



April 19, 2020

VIA EMAIL

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The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-food
House of Commons Ottawa, Ontario
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Dear Minister:

I hope this finds you and your staff well. I am writing on behalf of the 250,000 members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW Canada) to reiterate and further detail some concerns that we have expressed to your office and other federal ministries in previous correspondence and telephone conversations.

As Canada's food workers, UFCW Canada members have dutifully served on the frontlines of the pandemic – making possible a continual source of safe, high quality food products for Canadians and many others around the globe. Minister, please know that UFCW Canada members – who work in key food processing facilities and every major meatpacking plant – are firmly committed to this effort. That said, food processing workers, as you are aware, have already been significantly impacted by COVID-19, and we need direct action from your department to prevent further spread of the virus in our workplaces.

While UFCW Canada Local Unions are in the process of trying to engage with provincial authorities on this matter, we strongly believe the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) must serve a central role in prevention efforts. Consistency – with respect to worker protections – is currently lacking in the meatpacking, food processing and food manufacturing sector. In response, UFCW Canada has identified the following points to better protect our membership and the industry as a whole. For the safety, security, and mental health of food processing workers, it is imperative that these measures be adopted system-wide, and that the CFIA ensures that they are immediately integrated into employer response strategies at all federally inspected facilities.

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1. Ensuring that workers are able to work two meters (6.5 feet) apart from each other throughout their working day. This is possible through modification to work organization, work scheduling and rest breaks. There may need to be changes to the design of the workstations such as the installation of Perspex, Plexiglas or similar material to shield workers from potentially infecting each other;
2. Reducing the speed and amount of product on the line to help ensure two-meter spacing between workers. This must be achieved without eliminating any positions; and decisions regarding shifts, work sharing arrangements, and overtime must involve the union;
3. Provision of adequate hand washing and sanitizer stations and increasing the number of breaks so handwashing may become a routine part of the work;
4. Ensuring regular, thorough cleaning and sanitation of the workplace, including restrooms and lunchrooms. All shared surfaces (e.g. workbenches, door handles, handrails, and keyboards) must be cleaned regularly;
5. Provision of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) – although this cannot be a substitute for appropriate spacing between workers;
6. Making arrangements for safe travel to and from the workplace to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19; and
7. Posting the agreed workplace protocols on noticeboards in languages that all workers can understand and maintaining regular communication.

Thank you in advance for your response, and if I can provide any further information regarding the points above, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Paul R. Meinema
National President