

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

April 22, 2020

**\*\*TOMORROW 4/23 at 2:30PM ET\*\***

**National Press Conference to Highlight Growing Impact of Coronavirus on Meatpacking Workers &**

**National Food Supply**

*America’s Largest Meatpacking Union to Announce New Estimates on Meatpacking Worker Infections/Deaths & Highlight Significant Impact on National Food Supply*

*Call Will Feature Meatpacking Workers from Smithfield, JBS, Cargill, and Pilgrim’s Pride Plants in South Dakota, Iowa, Georgia, Texas, and Kansas*

**WASHINGTON, D.C. – Tomorrow, April 23 at 2:30PM ET**, the [**United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) International Union**](http://www.ufcw.org/about),which represents 1.3 million workers in food and retail, will host a press call featuring **UFCW International President Marc Perrone** as well as meatpacking workers from across the country.

On the press call, UFCW will announce **new estimates on meatpacking worker infections and deaths**, discuss the **impact on the national food supply**, and highlight a newly-released letter to **demand action from the USDA and White House Task Force** to strengthen safety standards.

The call will feature **meatpacking workers from across the country** who will speak about the real challenges they face working on the frontlines of the outbreak in some of the nation’s largest meatpacking facilities.

* **WHAT**: National Press Call on Coronavirus Impact on Meatpacking Workers
* **WHEN**: **Tomorrow, April 23 at 2:30 PM ET**
* **SPEAKERS**:
  + **UFCW International President Marc Perrone**
  + **UFCW International Vice President for Meatpacking Mark Lauritsen**
  + **Smithfield** pork worker in **South Dakota** - Achut Deng
  + **Cargill** beef worker in **Kansas** - Itzel Goytia
  + **JBS** pork worker in **Iowa** - Margarita Heredia
  + **Cargill** beef worker in **Texas** - Rhonda Trevino
  + **Pilgrim’s Pride poultry worker in Georgia** - Tony Adams

**MEDIA RSVP: To join the press call, email Abraham White at** [**awhite@ufcw.org**](mailto:awhite@ufcw.org)

**Background:**

With [a sharp increase in COVID-19 meatpacking worker infections and deaths](https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/jbs-shuts-minnesota-pork-plant-hit-covid-19-70246042), UFCW recently sent [a letter to the CDC](http://www.ufcw.org/2020/04/08/cdcguidance/) calling for new mandatory safety guidelines for frontline workers.

This week, UFCW sent [a letter to the USDA](http://www.ufcw.org/2020/04/20/protectpackingworkers/) urging immediate action to strengthen safety standards for meatpacking workers and plants, focusing on **five immediate steps** to protect meatpacking workers from the coronavirus:

* **Prioritize Essential Workers for Testing**: To protect meatpacking workers and the food supply, these essential workers must be prioritized for testing.
* **Immediate Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** Meatpacking and food processing workers must have priority access to the critical personal protection equipment necessary to do their job and reduce the risk of exposure.
* **Immediate Halt On Line Speed Waivers:** USDA’s recent [approval](https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/news/usda-removing-safeguards-food-while-everyone-else-fighting-pandemic) of 11 regulatory waivers for poultry plants to increase line speeds shows a reckless disregard for worker safety during this pandemic. The USDA must immediately cease granting any new waivers and suspend all existing waivers that allow plants to operate at faster speeds.
* **Mandate Social Distancing Where Possible:** Companies must enforce and practice six-foot social and physical distancing to the greatest extent possible, even if it slows production. When not possible, companies should use plexiglass barriers and/or ensure all workers have masks that can safely be used under these extreme conditions.

**Isolate Workers Who Show Symptoms or Test Positive for COVID-19:** In light of the largest outbreak to date at Smithfield Foods in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, it is critical to identify and isolate workers who test positive or exhibit COVID-19 symptoms. These workers must be allowed to quarantine at home, with pay, per CDC recommendations.