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21 April, 2020

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C M.P.
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Freeland,

I hope you are well. I am writing to request an urgent meeting to discuss the pressing concern of the spread of COVID-19 in meat processing facilities in Canada.

We represent food of inspectors who work for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and without whom meat plants and other food production establishments cannot operate.

As you know, meat processing plants in Canada have become “hot spots” where the virus is spreading quickly. In spite of this, there is a patchwork of policies and procedures that leave people who work in these plants exposed to infection that could undermine food security for Canadians and spread the virus further.

The CFIA has provided only limited [“guidance”](#) to meat processing plants in Canada, while provincial Health Authorities provide direction on self-isolation for positive finds of COVID-19. Both authorities have left it to plants themselves to decide what action is appropriate to safeguard food production and public health. As a result, an outbreak at the Olymel pork slaughter facility in Quebec led to a 14-day shutdown to ensure only non-infected staff returned to work. Meanwhile, owners of the Cargill plants south of Calgary have opted to reduce production at the plant for a few days in the face of a much larger outbreak, which has grown by a factor of ten in just a few days.

Only in recent days have inspectors been equipped with some items of protective equipment. None have access to routine testing for the virus. Most plant workers do not have these adequate protections.

If continued operation of these facilities is a strategic priority for the government, as I am sure it is, this situation must change. We recommend:

- The CFIA must adopt a standard approach to the presence of COVID-19 in meat and other food production facilities that places the health and safety of those working in the plants first. At the first positive test result, the facilities should be closed for a 14-day period with workers receiving full pay to ensure only non-infected staff returned to work.
- Anyone accessing the plants needs to be screened on arrival and departure.
- Limits should be placed on the number of processing plants inspectors are assigned to, just as Personal Support Workers in long-term care facilities have been limited to working at one facility
- Inspectors, veterinarians, and plant workers need personal protective equipment and routine testing for the virus.
- Because most meat production establishments are configured to make social distancing impossible, shift and production schedules, lunchroom usage, washup and bathroom facilities must be modified to maximize separation of personnel.
- Sanitation at these facilities must be vigorous.

Madame Minister, the inspectors, veterinarians and food production workers cannot do their jobs from home. They have shown up every day since the beginning of this crisis, at considerable personal risk, to make sure production is not disrupted. Not a single day of food production has been lost because of workers exercising their right to refuse unsafe work. Because their work cannot be readily seen, it is easy to lose sight of the critical role they are playing. I know you are aware of this. Let's work together to safeguard them and Canadians' food supply.

Please get back to me at your earliest convenience. Our colleagues from the United Food and Commercial Workers who represent plant workers, among others in the food industry, will be joining us. We will make ourselves available to you or your staff at your convenience. Please feel free to reach out to me on my personal cell phone 613-715-3767.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fabian Murphy', written in a cursive style.

Fabian Murphy

National President

Président national

Agriculture Union, PSAC

Syndicat de l'Agriculture, AFPC

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The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau