

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1304

May 1, 2020

Mr. Bruce Rundle
General Manager
Smithfield Foods
1220 North 6th Street Road
Monmouth, Illinois 61462

Dear Mr. Rundle:

The downturn in our economy; the closing of restaurants; the idling of food distribution companies and rising unemployment have surely made this national health emergency a formidable challenge to your company and our national food chain. At the heart of it is our battle against COVID-19 and the deadly path it has cut across the world.

During this pandemic, one priority rises above the rest in maintaining the national food supply chain: the health and safety of the workforce. In every processing facility that remains operating, we know workers can literally be risking their lives by working shoulder to shoulder on meat processing lines.

President Trump's Executive Order that instructs meat and poultry processors to continue to operate fails to address the health and safety realities of this pandemic that have been repeatedly affirmed by our nation's top epidemiologists.

More than 5,000 workers in meat processing plants have reportedly tested positive or gone into quarantine because of COVID-19, and at least 20 workers have reportedly died. The spread of COVID-19 in processing plants has also worsened bottlenecks in the food supply chain, causing at least 22 plants to shut down operations.

The correct federal response must start with a commitment to worker protection, equipment and testing. Unfortunately, the President's Executive Order if not properly implemented can endanger the lives of even a wider population of the meat processing workforce and threaten a far broader scope of food processing capacity. I do not believe this is a responsible course.

I respectfully ask you to respond to these questions so that I can understand your thoughts on this critical policy issue. If you believe that a timely telephone conference could expedite this exchange of information, I would be happy to accommodate your schedule.

1. What is your source for PPE and testing for your workers? What is the timeframe between request and delivery of PPE and testing? What, if any, are your current stockpiles of PPE and testing, and what is the burn rate or projected duration for how long those will last you? What are your plans to increase PPE and testing within your workforce if illnesses increase?

2. What is your plan for the tracking and monitoring of the health and safety of your workers? How are you working with state or local public health officials in the development of such plans?
3. What is your facility threshold number for unacceptable illnesses within your workforce that will trigger a shutdown?
4. What arrangements have been established by your facility with the hospitals or health care providers that serve your region regarding their capacity to address any increase in illnesses that may occur as a result of this Executive Order?
5. What accommodations are you making to include social distancing in your workplace and what changes will this require in your production process?
6. What inspection will you require to assure compliance with any new rules or process changes to protect the health and safety of your workforce?
7. What is your paid sick leave policy for your employees?

Thank you for your prompt response to these questions.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator