

Dole Foods in Ohio hit by 230 COVID-19 cases as food processing plants globally are ravaged by infections

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The global food processing industry has been struck by a series of coronavirus outbreaks in processing plants around the world. Case in point, at a Dole Foods plant in Springfield, Ohio, 230 workers have tested positive for COVID-19. Despite more than a quarter of the workforce contracting the virus, Dole and the state of Ohio have refused to close the factory. The company claimed that “the plant is not likely the source of transmission and closure is not warranted,” according to WHIO-TV.

Such a statement exposes the contempt the ruling class possesses for the working class. Regardless of where the source of transmission began, the plant is now a center of infection. To ignore that the virus is spreading between workers is not just neglectful, but criminal.

Opposition to this murderous policy was expressed by Barry Scuttles, a worker at the Dole plant. In an interview with WHIO-TV he stated, “Corporate America is worried about money. They’re not worried about their workers. I can get another job. I can’t get another life.” He also noted that workers would be working 12-hour shifts to make up for the time lost by infected employees missing work.

In a similar event, PepsiCo China announced the closure of a food processing plant in Beijing on June 15 after at least one employee tested positive for the virus. Beijing reported its first case in a recent outbreak on June 11 in a resurgence of nearly 230 cases linked to its Xinfadi wholesale food district, according to Reuters.

The resurgence of COVID-19 in China is a prime example of how food processing centers can be hotbeds of transmission, even in places in which the virus had been believed to have been largely contained.

Seven workers tested positive last week at Champlain Valley Specialty of NY, a food processing company that packages sliced apples in Oswego, New York. Oswego County is preparing, along with much of upstate and western New York, to move on to Phase 4 of reopening in the coming weeks. This phase marks a near complete reopening of economic and school activity with some minor caveats for social distancing.

In the United Kingdom, several meat processing facilities have been forced to halt operations. Oscar Mayer reported that 38 workers were infected at their Rowan Foods plant in northern Wales but have refused to close the plant. Asda, the UK’s third largest meat packager, closed its plant in Kirklees, West Yorkshire after several workers tested positive. Meanwhile, the company 2 Sisters has reported that the number of workers infected in its plants has reached 158 as of June 21 and has closed its poultry plant in Wales.

In Gütersloh, Germany, more than 1,500 workers have been infected in the Toennies meat processing plant. The outbreak has spurred the state of North Rhine-Westphalia to impose a lockdown on more than 360,000 people living in the district.

The fact that food processing plants are major centers of infection should come as no surprise. Dozens to hundreds of workers are crammed into factories with little to no social distancing and mediocre protective measures. Additionally, workers typically work in enclosed, refrigerated areas that are a prime environment for the virus to thrive and transmit.

The vulnerability of food processing workers and the persistence of outbreaks in them demonstrate the anti-scientific and murderous character of the back-to-work drive. The pandemic is far from over and a reckless

back-to-work drive in countries that have already seen large outbreaks will inevitably fuel an explosion of cases.

These policies demonstrate the incompatibility of the profit system with public health. All sick workers could be provided with full pay and all essential workers could be provided with the protective equipment they require. The money exists, but only for the benefit of corporations and the ruling elite. Trillions of dollars have been doled out to big business in the CARES Act. Yet hardly a penny can be spared to save the lives of workers and their families without squeals of pain from the financial oligarchy.



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