

Immigrant worker shot dead by police at Oklahoma meatpacking plant

Chase Lawrence
20 January 2023

A worker at a Seaboard Foods pork processing plant in Guymon, Oklahoma was killed by police while working on the line on January 9. Chiewelthap Mariar, 26, was a refugee from Sudan.

A worker who filmed the incident and was fired by the company in retaliation told the *Guardian* that Mariar was fired by his supervisor and then told to finish his shift by human resources. The supervisor confronted Mariar, presumably afterwards, and police arrived to escort him off the premises. Seaboard Foods did not comment on, nor refute this characterization.

The worker said that management kept workers on the job after the shooting. “I worked in maintenance. All they had us do was cover the scene with plastic, and we proceeded to finish what was on the production line.” He added that “This company fired me for recording the truth they were trying to brush under the mat. They never asked me if I was OK. It was my first time seeing a guy get killed – and then I get fired.”

“I witnessed the entire thing, from when they [presumably the supervisor] started arguing with him until he was shot,” the worker said, explaining that Mariar “had a company-issued band-cutter in his hand. When the police got to the plant, the guy was already working, minding his own business.” The video shown to the *Guardian* showed Mariar doing just this.

“They made him out to be a danger when they said he had a knife in his hand, when it wasn’t. And that’s wrong on so many levels,” the worker said.

Another worker from a different shift criticized management and stated that the on-site human resources department was hard to work with. The worker said “They didn’t have to bring the police in,” and that “The whole thing is unfair. He did not have to have his life taken away.”

A spokesperson for Seaboard Corporation, the parent

company for Seaboard Foods, claimed that “Following the incident, operations were ceased for the remainder of the evening and the following day, and we provided in-person counseling services for employees throughout the week, in addition to ongoing phone counseling services available 24 hours, seven days a week.”

Feigning sympathy, the spokesperson added “We express our heartfelt sorrow to Chiewelthap Mariar’s family, co-workers, friends and those affected by his death following an incident at our Guymon processing plant involving the Guymon police department on 9 January.”

The Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI) announced an ongoing investigation on January 10 of the officer-involved shooting at the request of the Guymon Police Department, whose officer was responsible for the shooting. The release claimed that Guymon police “answered a call for service at that same address in reference to an agitated and disgruntled employee at a local business” and that “While speaking with the employee, identified as Chiewelthap Mariar, 26, Mariar produced a knife and began advancing on officers.” The release claims that “Officers attempted to de-escalate the situation before eventually deploying a taser” and that the “taser was unsuccessful and Mariar continued advancing on officers at which point an officer fired his service weapon striking Mariar.”

The OSBI declined to comment to the *Guardian* and did not clarify if the “knife” was in fact the company-issued band-cutter seen in the video.

The release is a white-wash, and indicates the character of the “investigation” will be the same.

Police kill an average of over 1,100 people each year in the United States, including 1,176 people last year.

Seaboard’s parent company, Seaboard Corporation, is one of the largest corporations in the world, ranked

number 382 on the Fortune 1000 Revenue Rank. According to Dun & Bradstreet, it had a sales revenue of \$9.23 billion for 2022.

The facility in Guymon, Oklahoma is responsible for the bulk of the pigs processed by the company, approximately 6 million hogs per year, at a rate of more than four million pounds (~1814000 kilograms) of product per day. This is equivalent to 5 percent of the 27.7 billion pounds of pork produced in the country in 2021.

The plant was cited by OSHA in June of 2022 for failing to properly document worker injuries and illnesses 51 times in just a two month period. It was also cited by OSHA for ergonomic issues facing workers in December 2021.

According to The Associated Press, in November 2022 three meat plant workers accused Seaboard, along with ten of the other largest beef and pork producers in the United States, of conspiring to depress wages and benefits.

As with the rest of the meatpacking industry, Seaboard has allowed the coronavirus to spread in their plant. Nationwide, nearly 60,000 meatpacking workers had been infected and 298 died by September 2021, according to the Food and Environment Reporting Network. Other estimates put the death toll at at least 86,000 infections and 400 deaths in the first 11 months of the pandemic. Meatpacking plants have served as a major point of transmission for the spread of the virus, particularly in rural areas.

The union at the Seaboard plant, the United Food and Commercial Workers, filed a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) arguing in April 2021 that Seaboard Foods failed to protect its employees from COVID-19.

At the time, Seaboard said that six of its workers had died from COVID-19 and 41 percent of its 2,500 employees tested positive. But despite union members getting infected and dying from a preventable disease, the UFCW did not call for a strike to prevent its members from dying. This is in keeping with the UFCW's role in other plants, including at a Tyson pork plant in Iowa where managers bet on the number of workers who would be infected in the opening months of the pandemic.

The UFCW has not called any action in response to Mariar's death. UFCW Local 2's president released a

statement on Facebook merely calling for a federal investigation and an "impartial review by the state in the pending investigation" into the killing.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact