

California worker killed in US Foods distribution facility

Marc Wells
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Juan Jacobo, a veteran US Foods worker with approximately 20 years on the job, was killed on January 21 while working in the company's distribution yard in Livermore, California, a major logistics hub serving Northern California. He died during active yard operations, highlighting hazardous conditions in the logistics industry and longstanding safety issues at the facility.

As of this writing, the precise circumstances remain under investigation, but accounts from workers and union representatives confirm that Jacobo was killed in an on-the-job industrial incident involving heavy equipment. The Livermore yard operates as a high-risk environment characterized by constant tractor and trailer movement, limited visibility, and crowded staging areas. About 200 drivers are based at the facility.

No major media outlet has reported on Jacobo's death. This silence reflects the marginalization of workplace fatalities in corporate media coverage, which systematically underreports the daily toll of industrial deaths and avoids scrutiny of the roles played by corporations, regulators, and union leadership in failing to prevent them.

Jacobo was not a new or inexperienced worker. His two decades on the job indicate a deep familiarity with the hazards of yard operations. This fact undermines any attempt to attribute the fatality to individual error and points instead to systemic safety failures—equipment defects, inadequate traffic controls, production pressures and the erosion of meaningful safeguards—that can overwhelm even the most experienced workers.

He leaves behind a wife and five children. In Alameda County, where housing and living costs are among the highest in the state, the sudden loss of

wages, benefits and future pension income represents a catastrophic blow to the family. For Jacobo's coworkers, the death has been deeply traumatizing, occurring approximately 10 months after the ratification of their first union contract, which was promoted as addressing workplace safety concerns.

Coworkers expressed deep sympathy and remember Jacobo as a steady and respected presence in the yard, a "cool cat" who embodied the collective spirit forged during their 2025 strike.

Teamsters Local 853 Vice President Ray Torres issued a statement on the union's Instagram account:

"Teamsters 853 member Juan Jacobo, who worked at US Foods in Livermore, tragically passed away on the job on January 21st. Teamsters Local 853 is holding a candlelight vigil for Juan this coming Tuesday, February 10, at 6pm at the US Foods yard in Livermore. If you can make the time, Juan's wife and five children would take comfort in knowing that he was part of a community that respected and valued him and his work. Let's show them they are not alone in their grief."

The statement made no reference to the circumstances of Jacobo's death, offered no assessment of what safety measures failed, made no mention of the contract's safety provisions, and outlined no steps the union would take to address conditions at the yard or prevent future deaths.

The response from some of Jacobo's coworkers on the union's social media was notably bitter. "They're only mourning because they lost union dues from him," wrote one. Others concurred.

The Cal/OSHA investigation into Jacobo's death is currently marked "OPEN." An inspection had begun earlier in January. The probe is classified as a partial-scope accident investigation, focusing on the immediate

incident and relevant procedures.

Such government investigations are typically a whitewash which impose no serious penalties on management. Companies can negotiate reduced fines, delay corrective actions, and often resume operations with minimal changes. Moreover, the agencies tasked with carrying them out face significant resource limitations that affect their ability to conduct thorough inspections and enforce compliance.

Drivers at the facility voted to unionize with Teamsters Local 853 in 2024 in response to years of safety concerns and poor working conditions. Workers authorized a strike on January 14, 2025, and walked out on March 2, 2025, maintaining picket lines for multiple weeks. The strike was explicitly fought for improved safety provisions, among other demands. A contract was ratified on March 12, 2025.

According to the union's ratification announcement, the agreement included "safety language that allowed the drivers to determine whether routes and trucks are safe to work, and authority to remedy safety concerns." The announcement characterized these provisions as "badly needed" protections that workers had secured through their collective action.

Jacobo's death occurred approximately 10 months after this contract went into effect. The question this raises is not merely whether specific contract language was violated, but whether the safety provisions negotiated by the union proved adequate to protect workers' lives in practice. The fact that a 20-year veteran died during routine yard operations suggests that either the contract provisions were insufficient, inadequately enforced, or both.

The pattern is not unique to US Foods. Following the 2023 UPS contract that Teamsters President O'Brien hailed as "historic," UPS has eliminated approximately 68,000 jobs—a development the union leadership has met with silence. The contract contained no protections against the automation-driven job cuts that union officials knew were coming.

At the national level, O'Brien has aligned himself with right-wing nationalism, praised "America First" economic policies, and courted the Trump administration, presenting the union as a partner in enforcing trade war politics and domestic austerity rather than defending workers' interests.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 5,283

workers died from traumatic injuries and 135,304 from occupational diseases in 2023—an average of 385 deaths every single day.

California has seen seven workers killed in an Esparto fireworks explosion (July 2025, Cal/OSHA fined the company \$221,000 for 15 serious violations), UPS worker Shelma Reyna Guerrero crushed by packages in Richmond (September 2025), and 19-year-old Brayán Neftalí Otoniel Canu Joj killed in a meat grinder in Vernon (July 2025). Recent fatalities across California involving overturned tractors, dump trucks, trailers and heavy gates underscore the persistence of lethal hazards in logistics and warehousing.

US Foods reported \$37.9 billion in revenue and \$494 million in net income for fiscal year 2024. While Jacobo's family may receive Teamsters death benefits, no financial compensation can replace a father's presence or decades of lost income and security.

To prevent such needless tragedies, workers must assert control over safety. The defense of workplace safety requires independent, rank-and-file organization controlled by workers themselves.

Such committees would have the authority to halt unsafe work, enforce safety standards, conduct their own inspections and link struggles across different workplaces and industries. This represents not a reform of existing institutions but a fundamental challenge to the subordination of workers' lives to corporate profit.



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