Tyson Foods shutters beef plants in Illinois and Utah, eliminating 3,200 jobs

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We urge Tyson workers to contact the WSWS to share how the shutdown has affected you and your family. All submissions will be kept confidential.

On August 13, 2026, Tyson Foods abruptly announced it was shutting down its major beef slaughter and processing facility in Joslin, Illinois, and its meat packaging plant in Eagle Mountain, Utah. Tyson also revealed plans to sell its beef processing plant in Pasco, Washington.

Since 2023, Tyson has shut down six chicken plants, a pork plant in Perry, Iowa, a beef plant in Lexington, Nebraska, and several other sites—cutting over 10,000 jobs.

The latest closures, which took effect immediately, affected over 3,200 direct production workers across both locations. The Joslin facility employed nearly 2,500 workers, drawing labor from across the Quad Cities metropolitan region and surrounding rural counties in western Illinois and eastern Iowa. The plant in Eagle Mountain, Utah, employed 723 workers. The operational fallout quickly extended to secondary contractors, with specialized sanitation provider Fortrex issuing an emergency notice laying off 103 workers at the Joslin site after receiving notification that Tyson had terminated operations.

Videos circulating online show workers scrambling into a packed room as company officials chaotically inform them that they no longer have jobs.

The closure of the Joslin plant has already produced major shocks throughout the regional agricultural supply chain. The plant accounted for a major share of total slaughter capacity along the Mississippi River corridor, drawing finished cattle primarily from feedlots across Illinois, Iowa and Ohio. Independent cattle feeders across the Midwest now face hauling distances of 160 to 400 miles to reach alternative processing facilities in neighboring states, adding substantial transport costs, especially as fuel prices remain high.

Under the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act and Illinois state labor statutes, employers with 100 or more employees are generally required to provide 60 days' advance written notice prior to executing a plant closing or mass layoff. Tyson submitted its official WARN filing to the Illinois Department of Labor only about 30 minutes before announcing the layoffs to the thousands of workers on August 13.

In order to get around the WARN Act, Tyson will pay workers for 60 days, through October 12, 2026 despite operations now being closed. Joslin workers may still lose company-sponsored healthcare coverage, causing medical bills to pile up for workers and their families who are now uninsured.

One worker, speaking to local news channel KWQC, said "Who cares if you get paid for the next five or six weeks? What are people supposed to do after that? What about the people who were only hired one month ago? What about the people they hired this month who can't get unemployment?"

Tyson Foods has publicly justified the liquidation of its Joslin and Eagle Mountain facilities as an unavoidable corporate restructuring driven by structural headwinds in the US beef sector. In official statements, executive leadership cited a severe, multi-year contraction in the national cattle supply, which has elevated live cattle procurement costs and compressed beef packing profit margins.

In response to the change in the market, Tyson Chief Executive Officer Donnie King initiated a strategy to consolidate the company's beef operations into three mega-facilities located in Dakota City, Nebraska; Holcomb, Kansas; and Amarillo, Texas. To support this centralizing strategy, Tyson plans to restore a second production shift at its Amarillo facility as cattle supply permits, effectively shifting processing volume away from unionized regional plants in the Midwest and Pacific Northwest to high-volume hubs in the Southern Plains.

Tyson projects a loss of $500 million to $650 million for its beef department in Fiscal Year 2026. But looking at Tyson as a whole, the company is far from struggling. Tyson operates as a massive meat monopoly, using high profits in chicken, pork and prepared foods to offset downturns in beef.

But workers were made to pay for the earlier period of historic high profits during the initial years of the coronavirus pandemic with their lives. COVID-19 ran rampant throughout the meatpacking industry, including at Tyson facilities where dozens of workers died. In December of 2020, it was revealed that Tyson managers at an Iowa facility—rather than take any measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19—organized a cash betting ring on how many workers had tested positive for infection.

At the average wage of around $20 per hour, it would take a Joslin plant worker over 800 years of full-time work to earn $35 million—what Tyson CEO Donnie King received in just one year.

The history of the Joslin plant

The Joslin beef facility has played a central role in the technological and structural transformation of the modern American meatpacking industry. The plant was originally designed, constructed and operated by Iowa Beef Packers (IBP), an enterprise founded in 1960 by meat industry executives A.D. Anderson and Currier J. Holman in Denison, Iowa. IBP shifted from traditional meatpacking operations built around urban stockyards in major rail hubs like Chicago, Omaha and Kansas City to more rural locations.

Prior to IBP's expansion, cattle were shipped via rail to multi-story packinghouses in major metropolitan areas, where skilled butchers earned relatively high union wages under master contracts negotiated by craft unions. IBP constructed processing facilities directly in small rural communities to tap non-union labor, replacing multi-story packinghouses with sprawling single-story horizontal assembly lines.

In 2001, Tyson Foods acquired IBP for $3.2 billion in cash and stock, absorbing its extensive beef and pork slaughterhouses into a newly formed subsidiary, Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc. Under Tyson's management, the Joslin plant operated as a high-volume processing node, slaughtering up to 3,000 head of cattle per day.

For decades, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1546 represented the primary labor force at the Joslin facility, operating through a framework of corporate collaboration, assisting management in maintaining high line speeds and suppressing rank-and-file resistance.

Workers at the Joslin plant, now kicked to the curb, endured unhygienic and dangerous conditions on a daily basis to produce the billion dollar profits collected by the company.

The death of Casen Garcia

On July 9, 2022, 22-year-old father Casen Garcia was killed on the job at Tyson Joslin. He died while working the third shift in the plant's rendering basement, where animal offal and fat are processed under extreme heat and hazardous environmental conditions.

Temperatures in the basement reached 120° F (49° C) alongside oppressive concentrations of methane and toxic fumes. An overhead electric hoist used to maneuver animal remains had exposed, uninsulated wiring. Despite multiple reports from workers who had previously received electrical shocks from the hoist and metal fixtures, plant management refused to halt production or fix the hazard. When Garcia attempted to take an authorized air-quality break, he collapsed.

Management's response was absolutely callous. When Garcia reported his severe chest distress over the radio, a supervisor told him to "walk it off." When he collapsed, supervisors ordered a coworker performing CPR back to the assembly line to prevent production delays. According to Garcia's mother, Tyson management kicked Garcia's body out of the walkway so cart operators could continue hauling carcasses, tampered with the scene, and repeatedly lied to police and his family about the cause of death. Tyson faced no criminal charges or regulatory penalties, and Garcia's grieving family never received a single dollar in compensation.

Government, union officials offer nothing

The response of local government officials and the union apparatus to the announcement of the closure has been only to cater to the interests of Tyson and other corporations in the region. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1546 officials offered no resistance whatsoever to the abrupt closure, accepting the liquidation of 2,500 union jobs as a settled corporate decision.

The only "solution" proposed by civic leaders and union officials is the organization of a job fair, where thousands of newly unemployed meatpackers will be forced to compete against one another for the few remaining jobs in the region.

Workers cannot defend their livelihoods, health or safety through the trade union bureaucracy or local capitalist politicians, who exist to uphold the "rights" of corporations like Tyson to make profits no matter the cost in human misery. If jobs, wages and working conditions are to be protected, workers must take independent action into their own hands.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on Tyson workers in Joslin and Eagle Mountain to organize independent rank-and-file committees, completely free from the control of the UFCW bureaucracy and the corporate political parties. These committees must unite workers across all Tyson processing facilities, linking up with agricultural workers, logistics laborers and manufacturing workers across the region.