

May 13, 2020

For immediate release:

As of today, Rantoul Foods has received notification from the C-U Public Health Department (CUPHD) of 83 positive cases of COVID-19 among Rantoul Foods' employees. Testing is ongoing, and efforts are being made by community leaders as well as Rantoul Foods management to encourage employees to utilize one of the available test sites, such as the Carle facility on Mattis Avenue in Champaign or the Frances Nelson Health Center on Bloomington Road in Champaign.

Determining the true number of employees who have yet to be tested is complex. Outside of the on-site testing on May 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, where employees who participated were tracked, Rantoul Foods must rely on self-reporting by employees that they have been tested. CUPHD only receives reports of positive cases from testing facilities.

The Cultivadores Latino Center in Rantoul is working to bridge the gap by reaching out to untested employees to encourage them to receive COVID-19 testing. The Cultivadores Latino Center services the Latino community by offering social services, counseling, a food pantry, and is currently serving as an emergency daycare for essential workers. Their founder, Rev. Nelson Cuevas and his wife, Esther, the center's bilingual Social Worker, believe this puts them in a unique position to facilitate having those employees participate in testing. Rev. Cuevas has indicated that employees will be referred to Frances Nelson in Champaign because they have a strong contingent of Spanish-speaking staff to help deal with possible language barrier issues. Rantoul Foods is providing pork to the Cultivadores food pantry to ensure that those affected and any families that need assistance do not go hungry.

In an ongoing effort to ensure the safety of the employees at Rantoul Foods, the Illinois Pork Producers will be conducting an environmental virus survey of the plant. U of I staff members will review the Rantoul Foods floor plan, and then will take samples over several visits at different locations throughout the plant. These samples will be analyzed for the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the information will be compiled to identify any hot spots for the virus throughout the plant. If hot spots are identified through sample collection, this will give Rantoul Foods management more information on where to focus their increased hand sanitizer stations, equipment wipe down efforts and employee PPE.

SafeWorks Illinois, who provides on-site medical services for Rantoul Foods, is continuing proactive daily conversations with CUPHD regarding employees who have tested positive, including their quarantine status and return to work dates. The safety of employees and the community at large is of utmost importance, and every effort is being made to screen and educate employees in order to minimize any spread through the plant.

CUPHD is also coordinating with the OSF Pandemic Health Worker (PHW) Program, who is providing daily contact, assessment, and follow-up with all employees who have tested positive or are determined to have had close contact with someone who has tested positive to ensure that workers are getting the care they need while quarantined.



Occupational Health Services™

This community effort provides a model for how employers, health care, and community organizations can come together to address the ongoing threat of COVID-19. Employers are an essential part of the communities in which they operate and understanding that these facilities do not operate in a vacuum will help with strategies to lessen the impact when outbreaks occur.

Rantoul Foods is the employer of choice for many workers and injects approximately \$25 million in payroll into the local economy each year. The impact of COVID-19 on Rantoul Foods is felt not only by the company and its employees, but also by the Village of Rantoul, and the approximately 200 pork producers, who are primarily located in a four-hour radius of Rantoul, who rely on the company to purchase their hogs. Most of Rantoul Foods producers are small, family-owned, independent operators whose main source of income is from hog farming. As with the entire meat processing industry, the food supply chain relies on the efforts Rantoul Foods and other facilities are making to provide a safe work environment for their employees.

### Contacts

SafeWorks Illinois  
Dr. David Fletcher, MD, MPH  
Medical Director  
[dfletcher@safeworksillinois.com](mailto:dfletcher@safeworksillinois.com)  
217-855-0979

Rantoul Foods  
Jerry Jacobsen  
Director, HR, Safety, and Business Administration  
[JerryJ@rantoulfoods.com](mailto:JerryJ@rantoulfoods.com)

SafeWorks Illinois  
1806 N. Market Street  
Champaign, IL 61822  
217-356-6150  
[www.safeworksillinois.com](http://www.safeworksillinois.com)