

Testimony of Poultry Worker under the pseudonym of “Javier Gomez “

Springdale, Arkansas

November 1st, 2021

My name is Javier Gomez, I am from Mexico and I have been working for Tyson Foods in Springdale, Arkansas for 27 years.

Despite the fact that in March 2020, Tyson called us “heroes”- the only act to show that was to give us a t-shirt saying that our work was “feeding the nation” and a paper to give to the police in case they stopped us while driving to work that explained that we were essential workers. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we saw the true value the company has for their workers. Rather, we were simply expendable for them. They did not give us the basic protections to take care of ourselves from the virus.

During that month we were told that we could bring our own masks. It was only a suggestion because they didn't make it obligatory for anyone. We couldn't practice social distancing because people got crowded in the hallways and bathrooms, and we work close to each other. I was extremely stressed because I did not want to get sick and bring the virus to my house. I was very worried about making my wife and my grandson, who lives with us, sick. In the same month, Tyson offered us a bonus of 500 dollars that they would give us until July with the condition of not missing a day. I was very concerned that they would encourage the workers to come sick because obviously the workers needed money and they were going to do everything possible to earn that bonus.

In April, we began to hear rumors among workers that cases began to appear but no one from Tyson told us absolutely anything about it. It was during that month that many workers signed a worker petition to demand PPE, paid sick leave and transparency about the growing cases. We wanted Tyson to be constantly testing workers and quarantining those who were at risk. However, Tyson only told us that everything was fine, that we did not need to worry because everything was under control.

After some public actions were made to demand PPE, at the end of April, they began to give us masks and put dividers inside the plant. But that was not enough. Many asymptomatic workers were able to pass the temperature scanner and many of them continued to infect others without knowing. We began to realize that many workers were absent. On June 4th, the company did mass testing at the plant. I tested positive for COVID, I was asymptomatic, but I infected my wife, who was only at home, and she became very sick soon after. We were isolated for days. After a week, I received a call informing me that I needed to return to work. They said if I didn't have any symptoms I could return to work. But they never did another test to ensure that I would not infect other workers in the plant. I know that there were many cases similar to mine. Many workers were returned to work after a week because they were asymptomatic. When I returned I realized that some coworkers had already died and Tyson never acknowledged their deaths. They never informed us about it. Those coworkers had worked for the company for decades. We felt that the company saw us as animals, and expendable that they could replace with other new workers. The deaths of the workers and the thousands of cases where many were infected is the result of the company's negligence because they preferred to continue making money at the cost of the workers' lives. So many tragedies could have been avoided if they had shut down the plants when there were COVID outbreaks to quarantine us and take tests to mitigate the virus inside the plant.