

Testimony of Poultry Worker under the pseudonym of “Juan Rodriguez “
Springdale, Arkansas
November 1st, 2021

I'm Juan Rodriguez, I'm originally from Mexico, but I moved from California to Arkansas 16 years ago to work in the poultry industry. I was working for Tyson Foods in Springdale for 10 years. I'm giving my testimony because I lived firsthand the tragedy of being exposed to die while working for Tyson during the pandemic. It was inhumane how the company lied to us to keep us working despite our own health and safety. I contracted COVID at the plant because while working as a mechanic, I had to go through the whole plant fixing the problems of the machinery. While fixing one of them, I got exposed to many workers that were doing their job crammed together. We never knew how many of them were already sick from COVID.

I was constantly asking the supervisors how many positive cases were at the plant and they kept telling me that everything was under control; that there was only one case, and that the person was already quarantining. It was this same week when I saw in the local news that there were dozens of workers already infected in that plant. I was completely terrified to come to work every day. Soon after, I tested positive for COVID. One of the biggest mistakes I saw the company making was requiring workers to work after taking COVID tests because Tyson never required those workers to quarantine while they waited for their results. Many of them tested positive and they were infecting others simply because Tyson never wanted to shut down. For them, the production was most important.

My life has changed completely after I contracted COVID. I currently have only 45 % of my lung capacity. I lost my job and I'm unable to find other jobs because of my health condition. I'm still struggling to pay my medical bills after being hospitalized for three weeks. My wife is the only source of income and we can't keep up with the daily expenses and debts we've been accumulating ever since I got sick.

We never felt Tyson did anything to protect us. They were pretending they were doing things but we always knew that it was not what we needed to feel protected. For instance, Tyson invested a lot of money to place temperature scanners. Yet, during the weekends, there was nobody to stay there to make sure that the scanner was working. I saw many workers coming in with a temperature because they were allowing them to work sick. There were also many asymptomatic cases that were infecting others without knowing because those protocols were not working to prevent the spread of the virus.

Despite them calling us essential workers, we felt humiliated because we were expendable. I'm now dealing with stress and depression because my life has changed completely, and I know it could have been different if the company cared for our lives. Now it's evident that we are never worth any value for the company, especially once we get sick and are unable to work.