

Ryan F. Quarles
Commissioner



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Kentucky Department of Agriculture

April 22, 2020

Governor Andy Beshear
Office of the Governor
700 Capitol Ave., Suite 100
Frankfort, KY 40601

Dear Governor Beshear,

We are writing today to ask your administration to prioritize workers at Kentucky's food processing plants for access to needed resources that will increase their safety during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture has the honor of representing the 75,000 family farms in the Commonwealth who produce food, fiber, and fuel for Kentucky and the nation. United Food Commercial Workers represents workers at Kentucky's food processing facilities. The work of our farmers and our workers has not halted during this pandemic, and in fact, they are needed now more than ever.

With many processing facilities around the country experiencing staffing shortages, it is critically important that we protect our workers so that our citizens can continue to have access to safe, affordable food during this crisis. The farmers that produce that food and the workers that process it are intimately tied together to produce food for our nation. Our organizations are uniting to advocate for your administration to consider carving-out a designation for these workers as frontline workers during the pandemic. This request encompasses the following:

- Per Centers for Disease Control guidelines, allow for increased access to testing as it becomes available;
- A place in line for the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) as it becomes available; and
- Extension of childcare service benefits for these front line workers similar to first responders and grocery store employees.

Major processing plants in Midwestern states have closed their doors in recent weeks and as a result, agricultural producers have seen a decline in market access for beef, poultry, and pork. Kentucky's processing facilities have been operational with only temporary interruptions. We live in a global economy and Kentucky producers have been affected by price erosion due to the pandemic. While our farmers produce the food that our country needs, our processing workers make sure that product gets from the farm gate to our dinner plates.

As recently publicized in the [Louisville Courier-Journal](#), processing plants understand that the goal is two-fold: protect workers and continue producing the protein our country needs. We appreciate the steps our food processing industry is taking to enhance worker safety. Kentucky's processors have modified operations quickly and prioritizing workers in this manner would better enable their employees to protect themselves from the coronavirus and ensure they can continue providing income for their families and food for the nation.

If we can be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact us. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Ryan F. Quarles in black ink.

Dr. Ryan F. Quarles
Commissioner of Agriculture
Commonwealth of Kentucky

Handwritten signature of Bob Blair in black ink.

Bob Blair
President
United Food Commercial Workers Local 227

