

May 21, 2020

For immediate release:

During a meeting between Rantoul Foods and the C-U Public Health Department (CUPHD) on Wednesday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, the health department informed Rantoul Foods that three additional positive COVID-19 tests that were administered on May 9<sup>th</sup> were Rantoul Foods employees. The delay in attribution was due to discrepancies in contact information provided to the health department and the information Rantoul Foods had on record. These positive cases have been included in the CUPHD reports since test results were provided to the health department but are now being counted as part of the Rantoul Foods total.

Due to those individuals receiving positive test results, CUPHD had informed them that they were under quarantine and unable to return to Rantoul Foods until they met the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for returning to work.

One additional positive case was reported to Rantoul Foods in the same meeting. This is an employee who took a voluntary self-quarantine beginning May 3<sup>rd</sup>. He developed symptoms on May 16<sup>th</sup> and was tested on May 17<sup>th</sup>. Since his last day working at Rantoul Foods was May 2<sup>nd</sup> and he first developed symptoms two weeks later, it is highly unlikely that he contracted COVID-19 at work. As with any other positive case, he has entered the CUPHD quarantine protocol and will not return to work until released to do so.

That brings the total number of Rantoul Foods employees who have tested positive for COVID-19 to 87, however, it is important to note that only one of those cases is new since the tests administered on May 9<sup>th</sup>, and the new positive case is not a cause for concern for other employees based on the timing of the onset of his symptoms and his absence since May 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The plant has been operating at less than 50% of normal. Obviously, Rantoul Foods takes the health and safety of their employees seriously and also understands their responsibility to maintaining the food supply chain, so they have increased production in small increments as they have evaluated how to reincorporate employees who are returning from quarantine. To help ensure the safety of employees, Rantoul Foods has received a donation of [face shields from John Deere](#) sufficient for the entire staff. These shields, to be used in addition to mandatory face masks, have been distributed to employees who are unable to maintain social distancing consistently throughout their shift. Face shields are also available for any employee to use, even if their work allows them to maintain a six-foot distance with other employees at all times.

Rantoul Foods is incredibly thankful for the generosity and support of John Deere toward workers in critical infrastructure and health care facilities. This is yet another example of how worker and community safety can and should be a group effort.

An environmental virus survey, conducted as a joint effort by several different disciplines within the University of Illinois (Virology, Civil Engineering, and Veterinary Medicine) will begin next week. The survey will evaluate ventilation in work areas to help minimize workers' potential airborne exposure and



will give insight into what, if any, additional precautions will need to be implemented to ensure employee safety.

Rantoul Foods, along with SafeWorks Illinois, their onsite medical provider, is finalizing their COVID-19 Assessment and Control Plan. This plan accounts for the additional safety measures that will need to be implemented as the number of employees working and production levels increase. Items such as administrative controls to reduce employees' risks, staggering of workers' arrival, departure, and break times, and the use of PPE or physical barriers, when needed, to separate workers from each other. CUPHD has been preliminarily briefed on this plan and will receive a copy soon.

Rantoul Foods took a hiatus from hiring after the first case was found. Based on the lack of new positive cases contracted at the plant, they have begun to slowly resume the hiring process. In order to help protect both current and future workers, all new employees must take a COVID-19 test and receive negative results prior to starting work. Prospective employees will be directed to the Marketplace Mall testing center, as they are considered critical infrastructure employees.

Rantoul Foods is so grateful for all of the stakeholders in the community who have stepped up to offer guidance, assistance, and open communication during this time. The recognition that COVID-19 is not an employer issue, but a community issue, has meant all the difference in a swift and effective response to this situation. It also allowed for early intervention in the typically disenfranchised Latino community and gave Rantoul Foods a partner to help them provide assistance to at-risk families in the community. The partnership with Cultivadores Latino Center has been a particularly positive consequence of this difficult situation. Rantoul Foods continues to strive to be a model to others in the meat packing industry for both employee safety and community support and they are committed to continued transparency about their efforts to achieve both.

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