

Title: Pork leaders to thank processing towns

Author: Donnelle Eller

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Pork leaders to thank processing towns

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Iowa pork and agriculture leaders plan to thank cities and towns that are home to major meat processing plants, which have struggled over the past year with large COVID-19 outbreaks.

The first event is slated for Tuesday in Waterloo, where the Iowa Pork Producers Association and Tyson Foods plan to give away 1,300 pork loins to families and honor a local food bank for its work to help families hard-hit by reduced hours or lost jobs due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's our way of saying 'thank you' for the support during the past 12 months, as the community lifted spirits and provided inspiration for Iowa's pig farmers and all of those involved in pork production," the pork producers said in announcing the events.

Joe Enriquez Henry, an Iowa advocate for workers and the national vice president of Forward Latino, said state

and industry officials should be mourning lost workers at meatpacking plants instead of celebrating.

"I am disgusted by this promotion," he said.

Through May last year, 6,131 workers at 26 Iowa beef, pork and pork processing plants tested positive for the coronavirus, data the Register obtained showed. That's more than one out of every four workers. The plants reported 19 deaths.

Worker advocates complain that meatpacking plants were slow to protect workers, including failing to promptly provide personal protective equipment and to erect barriers or provide space between workers to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Companies say they've spent millions of dollars modifying processing lines, screening workers for signs of illness and providing protective equipment, among other actions. Some also have launched vaccination drives for their employees.

Tyson came under intense criticism

in November after attorneys representing families in wrongful death lawsuits revealed that managers and supervisors at the Waterloo plant bet on the number of workers who would be sickened by the coronavirus.

In December, Tyson said it fired seven managers following an independent investigation led by former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder. The company said the managers' actions do not "represent the Tyson core values."

Iowa Rep. Ras Smith, a Democrat who represents Waterloo, said the northeast Iowa city and its workers deserve gratitude. But, he added, the state needs to do more to ensure workplace safety.

"Many lost so much," he said, while Tyson experienced strong profits in 2020.

In addition to Waterloo, the Iowa pork producers plan similar community appreciation events this spring in Denison, where Quality Food Processors is located; Marshalltown and Ottumwa, home to JBS pork processing plants;

Sioux City, home to Seaboard Triumph Foods; and Storm Lake, where Tyson also operates pork and turkey processing plants.

At Tuesday's event — marking National Ag Day — Iowa Agriculture Secretary Mike Naig and Waterloo Mayor Quentin Hart will join pork producers and industry leaders to give the Iowa Food Bank Association an award for community leadership.



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The **Iowa Pork Producers Association** plans to donate \$1,000 to the Northeast **Iowa** Food Bank, as well as deliver “pork thank-you baskets” to local first responders and provide Hy-Vee and Fareway customers with coupons for pork purchases.

The award presentation is scheduled for 11 a.m. at the Northeast Food Bank, 1605 Lafayette St. Pork loins will be distributed while supplies last from 4-6 p.m. at the National Cattle Congress, 257 Ansborough Ave.

Donnelle Eller covers agriculture, the environment and energy for the Register.