

March 10, 2020



Dear:

The U.S. pork industry, which is suffering from a severe labor shortage on farms and in plants, is headed for a serious market disruption with catastrophic implications for hog farmers. According to industry economists and analysts, there are not enough available workers to run weekday second shifts or Saturday shifts in many of the nation's pork packing plants. Hog farmers are also struggling to find a sustained supply of workers as unemployment rates have fallen dramatically. While the labor shortfall has been recognized as a significant problem in recent years, plants have had enough plant capacity to harvest hogs being sent to market. That is about to change, and it will have dire financial consequences for hog farmers and their communities if the labor shortage is not quickly addressed.

Twenty years ago, the industry suffered from a plant-capacity shortage and the damage exacted on hog farmers was deep and lasting. The price of market hogs collapsed to almost zero. Many hog farmers lost everything. The industry became more consolidated. Without a solution to the labor shortage on farm and in plants, this scenario may play out again.

The United States is the world's largest exporter of pork, the number one meat consumed globally. Pork alone can put a huge dent in the U.S./China trade imbalance because the United States produces the safest, highest quality pork in the world at very affordable prices. Because our product is in such demand and we are so competitive, U.S. pork is an engine of economic growth in many regions of the nation. Unfortunately, the severe labor shortage we face threatens the financial livelihoods of thousands of hog farmers, their employees and their communities.

While industry economists and analysts have been expecting the capacity shortfall to begin in September, the COVID-19 situation could cause significant capacity shortfalls much sooner and put daily animal care needs at risk. School closures preventing parents from going to work are already a concern in farm and plant communities. The specter of market-ready hogs with nowhere to go is a nightmare for every pork producer in the nation. It would result in severe economic fallout in rural communities and a major animal welfare challenge.

We call on federal and state officials to work with the U.S. pork industry to mitigate the impact on our industry and the communities which depend on us. Specifically, we ask for solutions for more and expedited worker visas and for the administration to develop support plans for pig farmers impacted by bottlenecks in the supply chain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Howard A. Roth". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Howard A.V. Roth
President, National Pork Producers Council
Pork Producer, Wauzeka, Wisconsin

The Global Voice of the U.S. Pork Industry

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