



# US Pork Industry COVID-19 and lessons learned

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reasonable  
legislation and  
regulation




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# March 10 release

- “The specter of market-ready hogs with nowhere to go is a nightmare for every pork producer in the country”
- Worst case scenario happens



**PRESS RELEASE**

## NPPC Seeks Labor Solutions for Potential COVID-19 Impact on Pork Supply Chain

**WASHINGTON, D.C., March 10, 2020**– The fallout from an ongoing labor shortage facing the U.S. pork industry and other agriculture sectors could significantly worsen due to the impact of COVID-19, the National Pork Producers Council said in a [letter](#) to U.S. government officials today. NPPC's concerns regarding COVID-19 are labor specific. There is no evidence that pigs can contract the virus.

In a letter to the president and other administration officials, members of Congress, and state governors, NPPC called for expedited solutions addressing the need for more workers on hog farms and in pork plants. It also called on federal, state and local governments to work together to develop a response to COVID-19 that protects public health and, whenever possible, supports animal care and minimizes disruptions to the U.S. pork production supply chain and consumers. NPPC also called on the administration to develop support plans for hog farmers if labor-related bottlenecks in the supply chain prevent hogs from being marketed.

"School closures preventing parents from going to work and caring for their animals are already a concern in farm and plant communities," said NPPC President Howard "A.V." Roth, a hog farmer from Wauzeka, Wisconsin. "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."

# COVID-19 Meatpacking Plants

- Human infections caused closures and slowdowns
  - Illness and fear drove absenteeism
- Increased safety protocols lead to reduced work flow
  - Social distancing, barriers, health screens, etc.

# Backups of pigs

- Slow down and closures of plants caused pigs to have no place to be marketed
- There were many days over 100,000 pigs capacity declines
  - Latest Hogs and Pigs report indicated around 2 million animals have “disappeared”
- Because of pig flow through our barns solutions were difficult
  - Double stocking younger pigs
  - Altering diets of heavier pigs
  - Not breeding or terminating pregnancies in sows
  - Alternate markets
- Still have concerns with excess animals in the fall



Direct from farm sales  
of live animals

Processing on the farms

Alternate markets:  
smaller processors  
non-pork states, wild  
game processors

Potential food safety  
and/or animal welfare  
considerations



# Animal Depopulations

- To preserve animal welfare some animals were depopulated
  - Worked to provide methods that were humane and approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association
- Environmentally responsible disposal of animal carcasses
  - Some states did grind/compost, other projects on shallow burial, also rendering

# Advocacy Group Challenges



Press Release

## Emergency Legal Petition Filed with USDA to End Cruel Farm 'Depopulation' Methods

Ventilation shutdown and water-based foam methods used to kill animal populations during the pandemic are among the cruelest ways to kill farmed animals



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**U.S. Department of Agriculture Petitioned to Ban Mass Burial, On-Site Incineration of Factory-Farmed Animals During Pandemic**

***Legal Action Calls for Creation of Public, Online Database to Track Mass Killing, Disposal Locations***

WASHINGTON— Conservation, environmental-justice and public-health groups [filed](#) a legal petition today calling for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to ban dangerous on-site incineration and unlined burial of millions of industrially raised farm animals killed during the COVID-19 emergency.

The legal action seeks to compel the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to protect communities and the environment from dangerous pollution resulting from under-regulated and poorly monitored animal disposal during the pandemic. The petition was prompted by the meat industry's rush to kill millions of animals that cannot be processed into food following slaughterhouse [closures and slowdowns](#) due to the spread of coronavirus.

The petition was filed by Earthjustice, NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council) and the Center for Biological Diversity on behalf of 14 organizations. Petitioners also urge the USDA to create a publicly accessible, online database that tracks federal assistance for mass carcass disposal and provides people living near carcass-disposal locations with the information they need to protect themselves from pollution.



# Opportunities and Successes

- Daily State and Federal Animal Health official calls
  - Identification of agencies that could provide resources
  - Purchases of additional depopulation equipment
  - Public/Private partnerships and initiatives
- Industry Incident Management Team
  - Public health, animal welfare, depopulation, disposal, production



# Lessons Learned

- Emotions run high during a crisis!
- Communication – sometimes blunt – helped tremendously
- Industry helping itself – in addition to asking for help from state and federal government – helped make progress

# Lessons Learned

- This was better than any full functional exercise or drill
- Lessons learned from COVID need to be applied to FAD planning
  - Depopulation methods
  - Disposal methods
  - Diagnostic test development and deployment
  - Data management