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'Death is so real': Immigrant group says meat workers afraid after COVID-19 plant closure

BY BILL GRAVELAND - THE CANADIAN PRESS

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— WATCH ABOVE (April 22, 2020): The workers at a Cargill meat plant in Alberta -- and their families -- are no doubt on edge, and have been for weeks. The novel coronavirus has significantly impacted the Filipino

community in the area because many are employed at the plant and have tested positive. Jill Croteau reports.

-A A+

An organization that works with immigrants says the temporary closure of a large slaughterhouse in southern Alberta has left many among its largely Filipino workforce fearful for the future.

[Cargill](#) shut down its plant just north of High River, Alta., earlier this week after an outbreak of [COVID-19](#) and the death of one employee. [The decision put 2,000 employees out of work.](#)

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Marichu Antonio from [Action Dignity](#) said 70 per cent of the workers at Cargill are Filipino. There are also Mexicans, Chinese and Vietnamese working at the plant.

READ MORE: [Southern Alberta Filipino community 'worried for our lives' as members test positive for COVID-19](#)

Her organization, previously known as the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary, assists new Canadians obtain services. She said it has received

hundreds of calls from Cargill workers.

Antonio, who is originally from the Philippines, said people are worried about what happens after the plant reopens.

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“The possibility of death is so real right now. They know the long-term implications to their families if something happens to them as the main breadwinners, so they’re very worried. They’re afraid,” she said.

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“They don’t know what their future is and they don’t know what is best for them.”



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Antonio said the death of the Cargill worker in her 60s has hit many people hard.

“The woman who passed away was of Vietnamese descent. She took her sick day that Friday and then she was hospitalized Saturday and passed away Sunday”

away, Calgary.

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Antonio's organization helped the woman's husband arrange a funeral.

Cesar Cala, a co-convener of the Filipino Emergency Response Task Force, said a significant number of plant employees are temporary foreign workers here in Canada alone. There are also many with permanent resident status who have their families with them.

He said those who are sending money home often look to save expenses by moving in with other workers.

"Either they rent places or they make living arrangements with other workers from other businesses. It's a good way to save money."

The cost savings go beyond living together.

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"They car-pool. Most of them live in Calgary, so it saves a lot of money for them to go in a car-pool ... five of them going there together and coming back."

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Cala said workers are worried about their health and feeling pressure to head back to work, even if they are still showing symptoms. He said having a steady income is a priority for them.

“For a lot of the (temporary foreign workers), their employment and their status to stay in Canada is tied up to their employment. It’s not just losing their jobs,” he said.

“It might be about losing their status as well. They’ve incurred so much cost coming to Canada and they’re also quite anxious, because there’s no clarity on what’s going to happen and what’s in store.”

Antonio said her group has been urging workers to tell their stories publicly.

“We’ve been asking them to [share their stories and their reality](#) but

we've been asking them ... to [share their stories and their reality](#), but they're afraid that they may not be rehired. There are many stories that they can tell."

Alberta

Cumulative

New

4,214 total cumulative **confirmed cases**



Alberta has **21% fewer confirmed cases** per capita than the national average. It also conducts **51% more tests** per capita than the national average.

Last Updated: April 26, 2020 at 11:10:31 a.m. EDT EDT

Sources: [How we got the data](#)

Canadian cases

CONFIRMED

45,755

(Today: +437)

DEATHS

2,489

(Today: +24)

RECOVERED

16,922

(Today: +491)

722,838 individuals tested (Today: +12,020)

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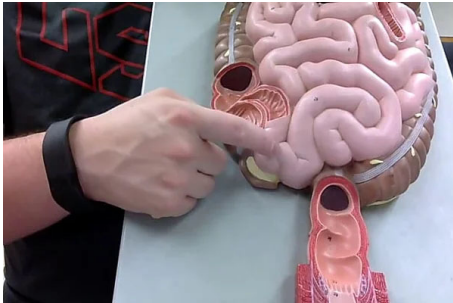
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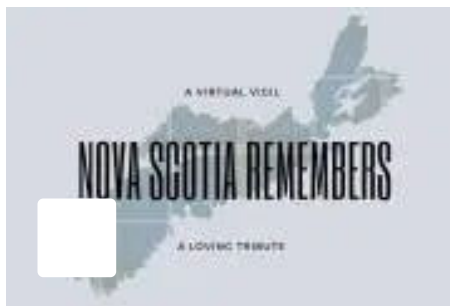
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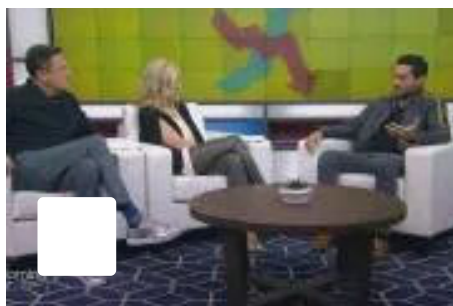
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**Damion Lutraan**

Good job Trudeau, keep the borders flowing and have a pathetic screening process. How else will he ensure a second wave...

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**Jeff Budinski**

Since Canada/Alberta is such a horrible place perhaps people should stop coming here. Many new Canadians have an advantage; they can go back from whence they came. People that have been here for centuries no longer have anything to go back to. Nice for them that they have a special advocacy too.

Like · Reply · 2 · 4h · Edited

**Jason Markwart**

So, how is the foreign workers losing their job any different or worse than the thousands of Albertans that lost their job due to covid....?

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**Charlotte Bryant**

There is no difference. Loss of work is loss of work. There needs to be compensation.

Like · Reply · 1 · 14h

**Randall Ronahan**

Charlotte Bryant nope send the tfw's home and let real Albertans go to work

Like · Reply · 3 · 7h

**Charlotte Bryant**

Why are they not hiring Albertans? Yeah I know, less overhead. Shame that they do not hire Albertans. Somebody out there enlighten me on this please. TY.

Like · Reply · 3 · 17h

**Jason Markwart**

It's the typical. They won't hire people from the area then say they can't find any local workers so they can bring in foreign workers and pay them less.

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**Jeff Budinski**



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