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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONFIRMED CASES OF COVID-19 AMONG TYSON FOODS EMPLOYEES AT WILKESBORO MEAT PROCESSING PLANT

[Wilkesboro, NC, April 28, 2020] – Several of the newly confirmed COVID-19 cases in Wilkes County were from residents employed by Tyson Foods in Wilkesboro. The infected employees have been instructed not to return to work and to self-isolate at home. Employees with whom the infected individuals have come into contact have also been instructed to self-isolate. The plant's on-site medical professionals are performing additional contact tracing within the facility, and the Wilkes County Health Department is tracing contacts the infected employees who live in Wilkes County made outside the facility.

Tyson Foods has taken a number of measures to protect its employees and decrease the chance for person-to-person transmission of the coronavirus at their facilities, including the following:

- Taking worker temperatures and installing infrared walkthrough temperature scanners,
- Securing a supply of face coverings before the CDC recommended their use and which are now required in company facilities,
- Conducting additional deep cleaning and sanitizing in all company facilities, including break areas, cafeterias and restrooms,

- Implementing social distancing measures, such as installing workstation dividers, providing more breakroom space, erecting outdoor tents for additional space for breaks, and staggering start times to avoid large gathers as team members enter the facility,
- Relaxing its attendance policy to encourage workers to stay at home when they're sick and eliminating the waiting period for eligibility on short-term disability benefits, so workers can receive pay while they're sick with the flu or COVID-19.

"We've taken both of our responsibilities to continue feeding the nation and keeping our team members safe and healthy seriously," said Chad Martin, group president of poultry, Tyson Foods. "That's why we've been focused on COVID-19 since January when we first formed a company coronavirus task force. We've since implemented numerous measures to protect workers and are constantly looking for ways to improve our efforts."

"We've also worked with the local health department on more mitigation efforts and have accommodated all its recommendations for protective measures."

The Wilkes County Health Department has ensured that Tyson plant has been given all the necessary guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), and NC DHHS.

In addition to this guidance, health department authorities speak daily to the plant regarding employee health and any new recommendations that have been developed. The Wilkes County Health Department has also worked with the plant to identify a process for how to manage confirmed cases and close contacts to cases. If a confirmed case is identified then the employee is told to self-isolate for seven days or 72 hours post fever, whichever is longer. Individuals considered close contacts to a positive case and sent home with instructions to self-monitor and call a medical professional if symptoms develop.

What's more, State of North Carolina and local officials have been in contact with the company's corporate leadership to discuss additional measures.

Eddie Settle, Chairman of the Wilkes County Board of Commissioners, said "we will continue to work with all companies to help ensure the safety of their employees and the citizens of Wilkes."

According to the US Food & Drug Administration, there is no evidence that food or food packaging is associated with transmission of coronavirus.

Meat processing plants are recognized as one of the sixteen critical infrastructures for national security, and the availability of their products essential to maintaining stay at home measures. The Wilkes County Health Department and other local government agencies are working to ensure that the plant can stay safely open.

However, with new cases introduced into the community, every individual must continue to play a part in fighting the virus.

Residents who think they have been exposed or who are experiencing symptoms should immediately self-isolate from all human contact and call their medical provider for further advice. People with COVID-19 have reported a wide range of symptoms from mild symptoms to severe illness. Possible symptoms include fever, headache, chills, repeated shaking with chills, shortness of breath, cough, muscle pain, new loss of taste or smell, or sore throat.

Staying at home, practicing social distancing, wearing masks, and taking other common-sense measures is now more important than ever. Every person is a potential carrier, even if no symptoms are present, so it's urgent that every person -sick or healthy- take action to help break the chain of transmission.

The chief elected officials at each of the county's local government entities endorse these measures and strongly encourage all residents to do their part to slow the spread of the virus, protect their neighbors, and accelerate our community's recovery.

Mike Inscore, Mayor of Wilkesboro, and North Wilkesboro Mayor Robert Johnson ask all area residents to "continue to be vigilant and comply with stay at home and social distancing measures. Take them seriously, protect yourself and your loved ones. Please continue to be patient. Your health and welfare are our concern first and foremost. United we stand!"

Chairman Settled added: "Wilkes County looks forward to defeating this virus so we can open back up soon."