

## Potential Implications of the Novel Coronavirus for the Greeley, CO Meat-Processing Industry

### Context

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As of April 20<sup>th</sup> there have been over 800,000 confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus in the United States and over 43,000 deaths. Meanwhile, Colorado has nearly 9,500 cases. Colorado is home to many businesses that have been deemed essential critical infrastructure industries by Colorado’s Governor. One such business that has received an abundance of media attention is JBS, which has a meat packing facility located in Greeley, Colorado (Weld County). This report presents available evidence on the characteristics of agricultural workers in Greeley and Weld county that are relevant for understanding how COVID-19 might affect food production in the area, and how worker assistance, such as childcare, may provide important support.

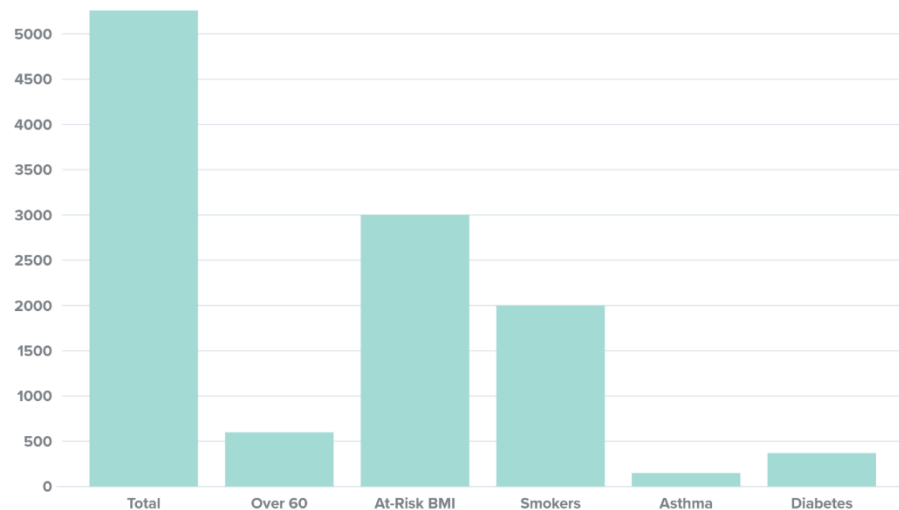
### Situation

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Greeley, Colorado, is located in Weld County on the Northern front range. Agriculture is a major employer in the county, accounting for approximately 7,850 jobs in food production. The area has risen to attention in the media due to an outbreak of COVID-19 among workers at the JBS meat packing facility. According to recent media reports, of the over 3,000 workers employed at the facility, 900 refused to come to work after the outbreak, 102 have tested positive for COVID-19, and 4 have died. The plant was temporarily closed for cleaning and has since resumed operations. This incident has highlighted the vulnerability of our essential workers during this time of crisis.

We estimate that there are currently around

**Weld County Food Manufacturing Workers**



5,259 workers in the food manufacturing industry in Weld County. Of these workers, we estimate that approximately 600 are over 60, 2000 have a history of smoking, 150 have asthma, 370 have diabetes, and nearly 3000 have a BMI that categorizes them as obese. These characteristics are associated with developing complications upon contracting COVID-19. Workers over 60 who have a pre-existing lung or heart condition are particularly susceptible, and we estimate that nearly 500 workers meet this description.

Additionally, we estimate that there are a total 4,000 children under the age of 12 who have parents in the food systems industry in Greeley. More than half of these children (2,400) are in families where both parents are working, suggesting that one parent will likely need to remain home with them now that schools have closed. These characteristics indicate the need for policy interventions to both help the workers themselves stay safe as well as to ensure the continued functionality of our nation's food systems.

## **Implications**

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With this level of risk characteristics among essential workers, it is imperative that policymakers make it possible for workers to have access to testing, sick-leave, protective equipment, and childcare. Without such measures, it is likely that critical industries such as meat packing will have difficulty maintaining operations.

## **Sources**

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IPUMS-CPS and IPUMS-NHIS, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org)

Denver Post: <https://www.denverpost.com/2020/03/31/jbs-meat-plant-greeley-colorado-coronavirus/>

Potential childcare needs:

[https://public.tableau.com/profile/jude2572#!/vizhome/StateAndMSAChildcareWithData\\_15856303970170/MSA](https://public.tableau.com/profile/jude2572#!/vizhome/StateAndMSAChildcareWithData_15856303970170/MSA)

Labor risk factors:

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/peter8125#!/vizhome/CountyEmployeeRisk/Dashboard1>

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