



November 18, 2015

Joe F. Sanderson, Jr.
Chief Executive Officer
Sanderson Farms
127 Flynt Road
Laurel, MS 39443

Dear Mr. Sanderson:

We are writing to urge you to take immediate action to raise wages, improve safety conditions and guarantee fair treatment for workers in Sanderson's U.S. poultry processing plants.

As you are no doubt aware, last month Tyson Foods committed to raise pay for new hires, for workers on the job for at least one year, and for maintenance and refrigeration workers. Their announcement is a small first step to improve working conditions for some of the company's employees, but it is not nearly enough. Employers must do more to address the concerns of poultry and meatpacking workers about health and safety hazards, compensation and a voice in their workplace.

As you also know, Tyson announced its action to raise wages just days before Oxfam America released "Lives on the Line," a report which details two years of comprehensive research about working conditions in the U.S. poultry industry.

Among Oxfam's findings:

- **Poultry workers earn low wages with scant benefits**, and the real value of wages has declined dramatically—almost 40 percent since the 1980s. Meanwhile, compensation for poultry executives is soaring.
- **Poultry workers suffer extremely high rates of injury and illness**, especially repetitive strain injuries from the tens of thousands of processing motions each day. The rate of carpal tunnel syndrome among poultry workers, according to government statistics, is seven times the national average. Despite the high rate of injuries, many workers lack access to affordable health care coverage and workers' compensation benefits.

- **Many poultry workers are afraid to speak up and advocate for better treatment.** According to an attorney familiar with industry conditions, “employees believe that at any moment they can and will be fired.”

As Thanksgiving approaches, we firmly believe that the lives of the workers who put food on our tables are a matter of vital public concern. A growing movement of low-wage workers and concerned citizens is calling for a \$15 minimum wage and respect for workers’ rights in all workplaces, including fast-food restaurants.

The workers who process our food surely deserve no less than those who serve it in restaurants.

We look forward to hearing about the actions you plan to take to raise wages, improve safety conditions, and guarantee fair treatment in Sanderson workplaces.

Sincerely,

Jessica Martinez

Acting Executive Director
National Council for Occupational Safety and Health

Rudy Lopez

Executive Director
Interfaith Worker Justice

Hunter Ogletree

Western North Carolina Workers’ Center

Please respond to:

Interfaith Worker Justice, 1020 W. Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, IL 60660