Meatpacking – Here’s the Beef

Part 1: How the Beef Got Here

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• Largest immigration enforcement action in US history
  – “Operation Wagon Train”
• ICE arrests 1,297 undocumented workers at six meat processing plants owned by Swift & Co.
  – IA, MN, NE, TX, CO, UT
• Swift loses 10% of workforce & denies wrongdoing
  – Several HR professionals are later charged
A Few Years Later…

- August, 2010 EEOC files two lawsuits against JBS facilities (formerly Swift) in Greeley, CO and Grand Island, NE
  - Hostile work environment due to employees’ race, national origin and religion
  - Blood, meat and bones thrown at Muslim employees
  - Offensive name calling
  - Offensive graffiti
  - Refusal of right to pray
  - Retaliation (firing) for attempting to observe Ramadan

[Link to EEOC news release]

Muslims in Greeley, CO, last month protested the firing of more than 100 JBS workers after a walkout over Ramadan.
Sara Loven/The Greeley Daily Tribune,
HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Slaughter house 1940s
The Old School of Meatpacking

- Urban
  - Cattle shipped to cities
  - Two classes workers:
    - Skilled “craft” butchers working in retail
    - Unskilled packinghouse workers working in industrial settings

- Close to regulators

- Workforce
  - Unionized & aware of rights
  - Native to US and established immigrant populations
  - Stable
Then came Iowa Beef Packers, Inc...

“Why should meat companies remain wage-locked in heavily unionized cities when unorganized workers could be hired at far lower wages out in the country?”

Currier Holman & Andy Anderson
IBP Founders
The New School of Meatpacking

- **Rural**
  - Cattle collected in rural feedlots and processed far away from urban areas
  - Craft butchers were more or less eliminated from increasingly automated production process
- **Distant from regulators**
- **Workforce**
  - Unaware of labor rights or the role of unions
  - Not native to US (some undocumented workers)
  - Hispanic, SE Asian & East African
  - 40-100% annual turnover
Immigrant workers normally enter the United States with the intention of working. Even adverse working conditions and low wages may be better than those offered in the immigrant’s country of origin. As a result, new arrivals may have low expectations and be willing to endure conditions, both at work and of home life, that American workers would not willingly tolerate.”
East Africa

- Eritrean-Ethiopian War 1998-2000
- Somali Civil War 1991-present
- Second Sudanese Civil War 1983-2005
- Ethnic violence South Sudan 2011-present
Myanmar/Burma

Karen/Karenni

- Sino-Tibetan language ethnic groups
- reside primarily in Karen State and Kayah (Karenni) state
- 7% of total Burmese population
- Waged war against central Burmese government since 1949
- 200,000 Karen have been driven from their homes
- 160,000 more refugees from Burma, mostly Karen, living in refugee camps on the Thai side of the border
Cattle Slaughtering Plants in US

Map Link: http://bit.ly/1qJ1n6b
# Cattle Slaughtering Stats by State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Region</th>
<th>Number of cattle slaughtered commercially, 2011 (1000s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td>6,865.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TX</td>
<td>6,833.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KS</td>
<td>6,417.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CO</td>
<td>2,499.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>1,763.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>1,074.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of West</td>
<td>1,393.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midwest &amp; East</td>
<td>5,845.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total US</td>
<td>32,692.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- NE: 21%
- TX: 18%
- KS: 20%
- CO: 8%
- CA: 5%
- WA: 3%
- Rest of West: 21%
- Midwest & East: 4%

The pie chart on the right represents the distribution of cattle slaughtering in the US, with each state/region's contribution shown with a different color and percentage.
WHERE WE CAME IN
How We Connected

• James Chiu
  – Lawyer involved in EEOC case & works
  – Represents workers at JBS and Cargill facility in Fort Morgan
  – Hears about worker safety issues through his civil rights legal work
  – Believed that few of his clients understand their rights on the job
  – Introduced us to...
Global Refugee Center

- Established by five leaders in East African community in Greeley, Colorado in 2008
  - Originally as the East African Community of Colorado
- Mediated disputes between East African communities in Greeley
- Began ESL language classes in 2008
- Now offer following programs
  - Seven levels of ESL
  - GED classes
  - Citizenship classes
  - Translation for healthcare professionals
  - Advocacy & assistance services
- Co-directed by Asad Abdi and Colette West
- Supported EEOC efforts
What We Did

• Two Days of Training
  – Work Comp
  – OSHA

• Partners:
  – Global Refugee Center
  – James Chiu
  – MAP ERC
  – HICAHS
  – OSHA
  – UFCW
What we learned

• Workers often denied bathroom breaks (sometimes passive-aggressively)
• History, religion and culture have impacts on meatpacking safety and health in real and tangible ways
  – Hazard communication
  – Strength of union tied to unity of workforce
  – Baseline awareness of workplace rights
• Impossible to separate OSH rights from other worker rights
  – Example: Religious discrimination against Muslims & sexual harassment of Muslim women
What we learned

• Global politics make union politics more complex
• Nuanced reasons why labor rights are not recognized
  – Example: Burmese union steward was ignoring Karen and Karenni workers, despite the union’s efforts to include “Burmese” representation in union leadership
• EH&S training can be woven into other types of education programs (ESL, citizenship classes, etc.)
• Different communities and cultures have different hierarchies and different reliance on the law to resolve disputes
• EH&S training may require a global perspective
Resources

Questions?