



**your voice at work**

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United Food and Commercial Workers Canada Union, Local No. 401

April 18, 2020

VIA EMAIL: [s.bebeau@sccoop.ca](mailto:s.bebeau@sccoop.ca)

**Sherilynn BeBeau**  
**Human Resources Manager**  
South Country Co-op  
969 16 Street SW  
Medicine Hat, AB T1A 4X5

Dear Ms. BeBeau:

**RE: Response to our Letter of March 27, 2020**

We wrote to you on March 27th, 2020 and did receive a response from you on March 28, 2020. Thank you for your prompt attention to our correspondence. Although your letter was detailed, and addressed many of the concerns we brought forth, there were some requests and questions that we posed in that letter that remain unaddressed. We ask that you immediately turn your careful attention to that letter and provide answers to each of the questions that remain.

This letter contains some new questions and some questions we felt important enough to reiterate. Please respond in full to this and our letter of March 27, 2020.

First of all, we notice that you have referenced a communicable disease policy and a contingency plan if one of your locations is declared the site of possible infection. That is a fantastic idea and one that some of our employers have embraced fully and completely. Unfortunately, some of those same employers have had to enact those plans in the past few weeks. It's smart and prudent to be proactive in your approach. Could you please forward that policy and plan to our attention at your earliest possible convenience?

Your employees will be relieved to know that you have a plan and should be well versed on how they can assist in executing that plan. They will feel safer when engaged in enhancing their own safety.

Unfortunately, some employees may in fact contract this virus or be exposed to those who have. It has recently occurred at different retail grocery stores in Alberta.

1. Could you tell us what financial supports are in place for employees who test positive for COVID-19 or are symptomatic?

2. Will they be asked to take a Leave of Absence and apply for EI or the CERB?
3. Will you offer those people a top-up of their wages should they have to apply for assistance?

Other employers have offered a top-up so that their workers do not suffer a catastrophic drop in their income as EI and the CERB doesn't cover all their lost income. In this day and age, many people live paycheck to paycheck and missing any income could result in overwhelming financial difficulty.

Also, the government sites are sometimes difficult to navigate have you contemplated guidance to your employees should they have to seek assistance? Some people never apply for the assistance they need because they are too embarrassed to admit they are intimidated by these sites. In the past few weeks there has been an unforeseen difficulty for families with small children accessing daycare as those care centers have closed during this time of risk.

1. If an employee must miss work to care for their children will you offer them support or will they be also placed on government assistance?
2. Will you grant their leave from work until such a time as this COVID risk is gone?

Health care has never been so important to everyone. We had asked if you would waive all qualifying measures for employees in accessing their health benefits and cover the cost of their health care should they have to take a Leave of Absence. A Health Benefit package could mean the difference between someone suffering through a long illness or recovering quickly and/or having to choose between medications to assist in quality of life or putting food on the table, paying their rent or mortgage. **Will you cover people who have to stay at home during this time of risk?**

With the advent of social distancing rules and the anxiety that new social construct places on workers in high traffic areas like grocery stores, liquor stores and gas bars, **will you have a program in place to limit customer congestion in your places of business?** We notice that workers get extremely anxious when too many customers are around. Customers don't realize the stress they place on our members. **Will you encourage people to shop singly per household and discourage couples or families from shopping together? What is your maximum number of shoppers per location?** If you have an action plan to enforce social distance shopping in your stores please forward that to our attention at the earliest possible moment.

During these difficult times, given that many people will be asked to work from home and abide by social distancing rules we had also asked that grievance and arbitration time limits be waived during this time. Please advise us if this is acceptable.

**Your letter to us ends by saying that you are considering additional policies and measures to ensure the health and safety of your employees could you elaborate? Have more measures been enacted?** If they have, can you please elaborate and send us any and all updated policies and procedures?

We would suggest that one policy that you could enhance is the premium pay you have implemented. While \$2 an hour is a start, we asked for pay to be raised to the highest possible rate in any classification and an additional \$5 an hour. Across the country, governments, the media, and the general public are finally realizing the important role that grocery workers play in community and yes: National security. Without them the communities we live in would devolve completely into chaos. These workers should be paid commensurate with their now finally recognized, enhanced social status. Many of your workers

could make more during this time by applying for the CERB and staying safe at home with a much lower risk of contracting this insidious virus. Please pay close attention to this request.

We have read your letter thoroughly and it seems you have been taking this threat seriously and have put some thought into how to operate your business with the health and safety of your employees and customers in mind. We hope that some of these questions and requests will speak to some ideas you haven't turned your attention to so that we may all come out of this better for the experience. We think this time of risk has the potential to bring people together as a community that cares for one another, something that our society has drifted from over the past few decades.

We would like to end this letter by to inviting you to help us in lobbying the provincial and federal governments for legislation that would protect all Albertans and Canadians through times like these and beyond. Universal Pharmacare for example would take the burden of cost from the employers and out of workers pockets, alleviating financial burden and stress from people's lives. Aside from that, there are plenty of issues that could meet common goal: to enhance your employee's quality of life.

**Would you be interested in assisting us in lobbying the governments on common issues that would benefit your organization and our members?**

These are unprecedented times and call for an unprecedented response with an eye to being careful, considerate and above all humane in your dealings with the people who work for you.

We know the Co-op to have a humanistic approach to its employees and the community. I believe the organization was created as a means for people to care of each other.

Take care of yourself and each other.

Sincerely,



Thomas Hesse  
President



Richelle Stewart  
Secretary-Treasurer