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Lisa M. Keefe, editor

# BE PREPARED

***I was a Scout.*** Chances are you were, too. You learned what to take camping and if you left your knife or insect repellent at home, you were in for a razzing from other Scouts or your leaders.

By the time you read this issue of *Meatingplace*, the dust from ICE raids on seven poultry plants in Mississippi will have settled. Processors will bemoan the ineffectiveness of the feds' identity verification systems and complain that the media focused on scared and disoriented kids, as if the byzantine system of E-verify and I-9s could grab a viewer's attention. They'll refute claims that the companies get off scot-free, pointing to sentences handed down recently on owners who knowingly employed illegals.

But that's all after the fact. The question is, are you prepared ahead of time?

Modern meat processing has preparedness built into its DNA. Every firm has HACCP plans, evacuation routes and contingency business plans in case of a natural disaster. But do you have a plan in case 40% to 90% of your workforce disappears in a matter of hours?

Immigration has been a hot-button political issue for 30 years. You've had plenty of time to prepare.

Children first: How will your employees' kids be cared for if their parents are detained? School systems collect emergency contacts; can the company or the school collect more than one, and widen that net? Meanwhile, companies can provide food and shelter, transportation, laundry services, and of course chaperones in

an emergency. You can't calm the kids' fears, but a chaotic response makes the situation worse.

Can you help your detained employees, with an emergency fund, perhaps, and legal assistance? You hired them, you should feel comfortable backing them up in a court of law.

Ultimately, the plan has to address the long term, and may look more like a fire recovery plan or a plan for managing through a labor strike. You need to be able to communicate to customers and suppliers on what they can expect in the coming weeks.

And, what options does the company have to help bolster the area's economy? A healthy community floats everybody's boat, and a meat plant often is a town's largest private employer.

A lawyer might say that even addressing such issues amounts to an admission that the company hires illegally. But, does practicing test-and-hold on product amount to an admission that the product is tainted? Is having an evacuation plan proof that employees mishandle the hazardous chemicals in the plant? Of course not. Being prepared is not just good business, it's often the law (see: OSHA, HACCP, et. al.).

If the allegations against the poultry companies hold up, I look forward to those executives going to prison. If a company used the programs available from the feds and some hires slipped through the large cracks in the system, the industry can once again push for better databases and federal cooperation. But those things take time. You can start to plan for a better outcome immediately. What are you doing to prepare?

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