

# Food Safety News Presented by Marler Clark LLP, PS.

## Cargill Adds 'Set of Eyes' for Food Safety

by [Cookson Beecher](#) | Feb 16, 2010

Cargill's Feb. 9 announcement that it will be using a third-party remote video auditing program to monitor food safety practices at its beef processing plants in Fresno, Calif. and Milwaukee, Wisconsin comes as good news to food safety advocates, consumer watchdogs, and beef producers.

Looking long range, the company will be piloting the project as a food safety tool in its North American plants, according to a Cargill press release.

Nancy Donley, board president of consumer watchdog S.T.O.P., Safe Tables Our Priority, told **Food Safety News** that she was pleased to hear about the video pilot.

"This really might result in a safer product," she said. "Consumers would be happy to see that."

Pointing out that it's human nature for people to behave better when they're being watched, Donley said using a monitoring program like this could reduce the number of worker-related food-contamination incidents.

"Seeing where the problems are could lead to safer products," she said.

Referring to the huge meat recalls in recent years, Donley said it's a natural reaction for the public to pull back from a product and to stay away from it after a recall.

"If food safety gets better for meat, there will be less and less for the media to be talking about, and people will regain confidence and start buying again," she said.

Food safety attorney Bill Marler was equally upbeat about the company's food safety pilot.

"I think what Cargill in instituting will become the industry standard," he said. "Instituting videos to monitor animal treatment and food safety will give the public the kind of transparency that will be good for the meat industry."

Oregon beef producer Bill Hoyt, president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, was also pleased to hear about Cargill's decision to use the technology.

"It's great that Cargill decided to do this voluntarily--



**Cargill recalls**

In recent years, Cargill has been plagued with recalls involving massive amounts of ground beef. Here is some information about those recalls:

On Dec. 4, 2009, Beef Packers, Inc., a Fresno, Calif., Cargill plant, recalled approximately 22,723 pounds of ground beef products that may have been linked to an outbreak of salmonellosis.

On August 6, 2009, Beef Packers, Inc., a Fresno,

on their own," he said in an interview with **Food Safety News**. "It's awesome. My hat's off to them."

Hoyt is hopeful that other beef plants will follow suit.

"We (cattle producers) obviously have a stake in knowing that consumers are getting a wholesome safe product," he said, adding that, overall, the United States scores high in food safety.

Pointing out that beef goes through many different hands before it gets to the consumer, Hoyt said that "if there's a stumble along the way, the impact of that stumble reaches all the way back to the cattle producer."

In his new position as president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, Hoyt has found that there's strong interest in food safety, coupled with some "tremendous" strides in improving food safety practices.

But at the same time, he concedes that because the nation's food production system is "so huge," it's not an easy task to keep an eye on everything that happens at processing plants.

"There are hundreds of people involved in every plant," he said, applauding the advantages of having a remote video system operating in the plants.

Referring to the beef industry's push to increase meat consumption, Hoyt readily admitted that massive meat recalls can set the industry back.

"We are equally as upset by the recalls as the public is," he said.

Cargill spokesman Mark Klein told **Food Safety News** that the company decided to go forward with the food safety pilot based on the success of a similar video monitoring project that focused on animal welfare practices at some of its plants.

Following up on that pilot, the company is currently installing the remote video monitoring system to monitor animal welfare practices at 10 of its beef plants in North America.

Klein described the results of that project as "terrific."

"We found that there's a lot of value in the sharing of information between plants," he said.

By seeing what worked well in one plant, the company could provide information about successful animal-handling techniques to managers in its other plants.

On the food safety side of the equation, Klein said the remote video auditing program will be used to monitor the stages in the process where workers clean and sanitize their knives and other pieces of equipment.

The company will also apply the technology to monitor procedures that involve dressing out the animals--skinning the animals once they've been killed and removing their organs before the sides of meat are hung.

Angie Siemens, a Cargill vice president who oversees food safety and quality, said in a press release that the major goal of the video auditing application is "to design a ground-breaking program that can further

reduce the E. coli and Salmonella contamination."

E. coli and Salmonella are pathogens that can sicken, or kill, people who eat food that is contaminated with them. Both have been responsible for massive beef recalls.

Pointing out that there's no silver bullet when it comes to preventing contamination of beef by pathogens, Klein said that considering all the people involved in meat processing, it's more about "all the little things we can do."

"The potential of this tool is that it could add value to our food safety practices as it has in our animal welfare practices," he said. "Video auditing will be another component of the company's overall efforts in food safety."

When asked if Cargill would share the videos with regulators should a food borne illness outbreak warrant it, Klein said it probably would.

Cargill has contracted with Arrowsight, Inc., of Mount Kisco, New York to provide the remote video auditing program, in collaboration with ADT Security Services of Boca Raton, Fla.

In an interview with **Food Safety News**, Arrowsight CEO Adam Aronson said the technology is implemented in a way that helps improve what workers are doing.

Pointing out that worker practices are "fundamentally a challenge that all industries face," Aronson said that when you have workers on a line, some workers will behave differently when the manager isn't present.

With random sampling of performance measures based on "near real-time" videos, company officials have the same advantage that sports fans have: They can watch repeat plays of what happened.

"You can be certain about making an accurate assessment," he said, contrasting that to what people think they saw and did when the line was moving fast.

Pointing out that most of the feedback about workers is good, Aronson said that managers have the chance to recognize and reward good workers and good worker teams.

That raises morale, he said, and even has work teams at different plants competing to get the best score.

The monitoring can also be used to pinpoint which workers need retraining or extra attention.

"That information can be fed back to their bosses. When you can see it on a video, you can visualize it," Aronson said, referring to problems and how they can be addressed.

According to Cattle Buyers Weekly, Cargill had 22.1 percent of the U.S. beef market share in 2008. Klein said that percentage is probably close to what it is today.

An agribusiness giant, Cargill has eight plants in the U.S. that buy cattle and two in Canada; two that buy hogs; and, four that buy turkeys.

In fiscal year 2009, Cargill had \$116.6 billion in sales and other revenues. Net earnings were \$3.33 billion.

**On the net:**

[S.T.O.P., Safe Tables our Priority](#)

[Cargill](#) (Go to "news center" and then click on "press releases.")

[Arrowsight](#)