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## TIGHTER REFUGEE RULES SEEN SQUEEZING MEAT COMPANIES

*Refugees with permission to work have been filling more low-skilled jobs at packing plants as authorities have cracked down on undocumented immigrants.*

By Kelsey Gee and Jacob Bunge  
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President Donald Trump's executive order to suspend refugee arrivals could hurt meatpacking companies that rely on foreign-born workers to fill tough jobs in rural America.

Refugee advocacy organizations said Mr. Trump's executive order on Friday to freeze the refugee program for four months and cut the number of refugees arriving to the U.S. this year to 50,000 from 110,000 could make it hard for meat companies to fill new jobs. Dozens of poultry and hog companies are expanding or building new slaughterhouses or processing plants after two years of lofty profits.

"As the administration pursues changes to the nation's refugee policies, we hope it will give careful consideration to the ramifications policy changes like these can have on our businesses and on foreign born workers who are eager to build new lives in America through the jobs our companies can offer," said Barry Carpenter, chief executive of the North American Meat Institute, a trade body.

Butchering livestock and cleaning slaughterhouses is strenuous, low-skilled work that many U.S. citizens won't take. At least a third of the workforce is foreign-born, industry researchers say. Since authorities started cracking down on companies that employ undocumented immigrants in the 1990s, more of those jobs have gone to refugees with permission to work.

Tight labor conditions in rural areas have led Tyson Foods Inc. and other meat companies to boost wages to attract more workers. Pay at slaughterhouse jobs starts at about \$25,000 annually, plus benefits, according to the Meat Institute.

Representatives for Tyson Foods Inc., Hormel Foods Corp. and Smithfield Foods Inc. referred questions to the meat industry group. Perdue Farms Inc. said its contingent of refugee workers is small. "We do not expect any interruptions in our workforce," said spokeswoman Andrea Staub.

Mark Lauritsen, director of the food-processing division at United Food & Commercial Workers, said the union's 250,000 meat and poultry plant workers includes tens of thousands of refugees. JBS SA, the world's largest meatpacking company, said in 2013 that about 15% of the 3,000 workers at its Greeley, Colo., beef plant were refugees. Emily Crane Linn, resettlement director at Canopy, a nonprofit in Arkansas, said many poultry plants in the state rely on refugees from Myanmar.

"Obviously this policy is horrific from our point of view," said Lavinia Limón, president of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, a nonprofit resettlement agency.

In Minnesota, muslim refugees take many starting positions at meat plants in small towns, said Jaylani Hussein, executive director of the state's chapter of the Council on American-

Islamic Relations. A spokesman said the national group plans to file a suit challenging the constitutionality of the order.

Separately, Starbucks Corp. Chairman and Chief Executive Howard Schultz on Sunday said he would hire 10,000 refugees over the next five years in the 75 countries in which Starbucks does business. "I write to you today with deep concern, a heavy heart and a resolute promise," he said in a letter he wrote to Starbucks employees in response to the executive order that President Donald Trump issued on Friday banning people from several Muslim countries from entering the U.S.

Mr. Schultz said the effort would start in the U.S. with a focus on hiring people who have served with U.S. troops as interpreters and support personnel. A company spokeswoman on Sunday said the company does not yet know how many of the 10,000 refugees it plans to hire will work in the U.S.