

**Voluntary Report** – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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**Report Name:** Dutch Meat Producers Told to Implement Strict COVID-19 Control Measures

**Country:** Netherlands

**Post:** The Hague

**Report Category:** Agriculture in the News, Agricultural Situation, Livestock and Products

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**Report Highlights:**

After the temporary closure of a slaughterhouse in Groenlo (Gelderland), some government inspectors working at a facility in Helmond (North Brabant) tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19). Accordingly, the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality has mandated that Dutch slaughterhouses develop a program to ensure the safety and well-being of all of the employees working in the facility (including the government inspectors working in support of the slaughterhouses). If sufficient protocols are not implemented, the Minister has threatened to remove government inspectors (effectively closing the slaughterhouse until the necessary measures are instituted).

## Background:

On May 20, 2020, the Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (known by its Dutch acronym of NVWA) temporarily suspended veterinary inspections at a swine slaughterhouse owned by Vion Food Group (Vion) in Groenlo (Gelderland) due to coronavirus (COVID-19) infections among its workers. In turn, Vion was forced to close the plant -- one of its four swine slaughter facilities in the Netherlands. This was the first slaughterhouse in the Netherlands to temporarily shut down operations due to COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> For additional information, see [NL2020-0021: Dutch Slaughterhouse Closed After COVID-19 Detected](#).<sup>2</sup>

## Update:

The Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (known by its Dutch acronym of FNV) has stated that several employees have also been infected at another Vion slaughterhouse in Boxtel (North Brabant),<sup>3</sup> and some media sources have reported that one employee at the facility passed away as a result of the virus.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, all of the employees working at the Van Rooi Meat facility in Helmond are now being tested for COVID-19 after three NVWA employees working at the facility tested positive for the virus.<sup>5</sup> Built in 2006, the Helmond facility employs 1,350 people slaughtering 11,000 pigs daily (which would account for an estimated 20 percent of Dutch slaughter). Production can be further up-scaled at the facility to slaughter as many as 14,000 to 15,000 pigs per day for the “deboning of hams, shoulders, and waists” and for the production of bacon.<sup>6</sup>

Arguing “... public health is really more important than whether you have a piece of meat on your plate tomorrow night,” the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality has mandated that Dutch slaughterhouses submit plans to demonstrate how they will protect the health of their workers (including the government inspectors working at these facilities). Moreover, the Central Organization for the Meat Sector (known by its Dutch acronym of COV) has called for all large and medium-sized slaughterhouses to test their personnel for COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> The Minister added, “{e}very sector in the Netherlands has to be creative. If we need more space, the amount of livestock being slaughtered may have to go down.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the Minister emphasized that slaughterhouses also must demonstrate that the housing and transport of migrant workers who are working at Dutch slaughterhouses be provided in a responsible manner.<sup>9</sup> On May 27, Dutch police closed Vion’s slaughterhouse in Appeldoorn after it was determined

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of this report, of the 657 employees at the Groenlo plant, 147 (roughly 20 percent) have tested positive for the virus -- 79 live in Germany and 68 in the Netherlands. See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-netherlands-meatpa/number-of-coronavirus-cases-at-dutch-meatpacking-plant-jumps-to-147-idUSKBN2310VT>

<sup>2</sup> NOTE: The temporarily closed plant has reportedly diverted its hogs to Dutch slaughter plants which remain operational.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bd.nl/meierij/ggd-gaat-boxtelse-medewerkers-van-vion-onderzoeken-vleesbedrijf-verscherpt-maatregelen~a899fa5d/>

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/noodkreet-uit-slachterijen-is-het-nog-wel-veilig-om-te-gaan-werken~a1af5e5b/> and <https://www.bd.nl/brabant/na-corona-uitbraken-in-slachthuizen-rijst-de-vraag-hoe-veilig-is-het-bij-vleesverwerker-vion-in-boxtel~acbc5921/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.omroepbrabant.nl/nieuws/3208554/personeel-van-slachthuis-in-helmond-getest-nadat-nvwa-controleurs-besmet-blijken-met-corona>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.vanrooimeat.nl/en/de-groep-eng/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cov.nl/nieuws/cov-nieuws/nieuwsbericht?newsitemid=5901484032>

<sup>8</sup> <https://nos.nl/artikel/2335207-schouten-slachthuis-moet-zelf-veiligheid-aantonen.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nu.nl/coronavirus/6053893/schouten-slachthuizen-moeten-maatregelen-nemen-om-sluiting-te-voorkomen.html>

that the employees had been seated too close to one another (less than 1.5 meters apart) during their transport to the slaughterhouse.<sup>10</sup> 531 employees work at the Appeldoorn facility which has the capacity to slaughter 4,200 pigs per day.<sup>11</sup> As of the submission of this report, it was unclear when the Appeldoorn slaughterhouse would be permitted to re-open.

**Attachments:**

No Attachments.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.boerenbusiness.nl/varkens/artikel/10887475/politie-grijpt-in-en-sluit-locatie-vion-apeldoorn>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/slachthuis-vion-in-apeldoorn-per-direct-gesloten-medewerkers-reisden-te-dicht-opengepakt~bf05fc7e/>