Retail Supply Chain Update
July 1, 2020

CDC leaving Cache County, Utah pleased with JBS; warns of 'ongoing battle' with COVID-19

- The COVID-19 outbreak at a Hyrum, Utah meat packing plant is “resolving,” the CDC says. Their team of experts is preparing to leave Wednesday.
- The team, under the direction of Dr. Andrew Boyd, arrived nearly three weeks ago to study and manage the high volume of cases coming from the JBS facility.
- The CDC team has conducted extensive surveys of the workers in an effort to identify how and where disease transmission occurred. The team has not ruled out significant early spread outside of the work environment — such as in homes, social gatherings, and employee carpools.
- Boyd said the plant is requiring face coverings, has separated work stations and staggered break times to limit congregation, among other measures.

Amazon’s Coronavirus Problem Is Worse Than It Let On

- For months, Amazon has said that its warehouses are safe, or at least no more infection-prone than the rest of the nation.
- Amazon’s workers have disputed the company’s public claims.
- According to a leaked memo first reported by Bloomberg, infection rates in a Minneapolis-area warehouse far outpaced those in the surrounding community, and Amazon knew it. Though the company has refused to release tallies of workers sickened or killed by the virus, it’s tracked infections in its warehouses for months.
- But by the middle of May, Bloomberg continues, Amazon “was aware of 45 COVID-19 cases at its MSP1 facility in Shakopee, Minnesota, enough for an infection rate of 1.7 percent, according to the memo. That was higher than the rural county that surrounds the warehouse, and roughly four times higher than any county in the nearby Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.” It remains difficult to tell if sick Amazon workers got exposed to the virus at work. The existence of a case cluster suggests that some worker-to-worker transmission may have occurred at the Shakopee facility, though Amazon disputed this in a statement to Bloomberg.

Costco stops selling half-sheet cakes

- Costco has quietly stopped selling the $20 half-sheet cakes across its US stores for the past month, instead pointing people toward its 10-inch round cakes and other assorted bake goods.
- The decision also coincides with a recommendation from several US states and health agencies to avoid or prohibit large gatherings in light of Covid-19. Half-sheet cakes feeds around 50 people, while its 10-inch round cake serves around a dozen.
New study uncovers some psychological predictors of hoarding toilet paper during COVID-19

- A recent study published in PLOS One examined toilet paper consumption during the COVID-19 pandemic across 22 countries. The findings revealed that the personality traits of Emotionality and Conscientiousness, as well as perceived threat about COVID-19, were related to an increased likelihood of stockpiling toilet paper during the pandemic.
- A total of 996 participants from 22 countries filled out an online questionnaire between March 23 to March 29, 2020, which assessed their toilet paper consumption. Specifically, subjects were asked to report how often they had purchased toilet paper in the past two weeks, how many packages of toilet rolls they had purchased, the number of toilet rolls currently in their home, and whether or not they had stocked more toilet paper than usual.
- Participants also reported how long they had been in quarantine, the number of high-risk people living in their household, and rated their perceived threat of COVID-19. Finally, participants completed the brief HEXACO Inventory, which assessed the six personality dimensions of Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience.
- As was expected, the extent that participants felt threatened by COVID-19 predicted their stockpiling behavior.
- Interestingly, no association was found between stockpiling and the trait of Honesty-Humility, a trait typically defined by fairness and greed avoidance. This suggests that toilet paper hoarding does not stem from a lack of solidarity. Researchers accordingly suggest that asking the public to refrain from over-purchasing toilet paper by appealing to their morality may not be the most effective tactic.
- As a takeaway from their findings, the authors conclude, “low anxiety and little desire to plan ahead are the best psychological protective factors to refrain from irrationally stockpiling limited resources in times of a health crisis.”
- Study report available here.

Instacart sues Seattle over premium pay for gig workers; loophole for food delivery remain

- Grocery delivery service Instacart and the Washington Food Industry Association are suing Seattle over the city's new premium pay for gig workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, passed by the city council in June.
- Council Bill 119799 states that food delivery companies must provide their drivers with a $2.50 premium pay for each order completed in Seattle during the city's civil emergency, declared by Mayor Jenny Durkan on March 3. The bill was the first of its kind in the nation to give such compensation to gig workers, and went into effect on June 26.
- The lawsuit, filed on June 26, claims that the bill violates Initiative 1634 which was passed by voters in 2018. According to Ballotpedia, that initiative prohibits local governments from enacting taxes or fees on grocery items.