

Kansas Plant Reopening After 'Pink Slime' Dispute

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WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — A shuttered Kansas processing plant that produced a treated ground beef product critics dubbed "pink slime" plans to reopen next week with limited operations amid rebounding sales, the company said Tuesday.

Beef Products Inc. said it planned to start collecting fresh beef trimmings at its Garden City facility beginning Monday to support its current Dakota City, Nebraska production operations. The Kansas plant is the first to reopen since the company closed three of its facilities over the 2012 controversy about the meat.

The Dakota Dunes, South Dakota-based company will rehire 40 to 45 workers for two shifts of fresh beef trimmings collection and a third shift cleaning crew at its Garden City location.

"It is good news for that community," said Jeremy Jacobsen, a spokesman for the Dakota Dunes, South Dakota-based BPI, said Tuesday.

Some 236 workers at the Garden City plant lost their jobs in 2012 amid the dustup over a meat product called lean, finely textured beef.

"BPI continues to experience growth and remains confident this growth will continue," Craig Letch, BPI's director of food quality and safety, said in a news release. "Although business conditions are not yet to the point where we can resume lean beef production operations in Garden City, this is certainly a step in the right direction."

The uproar prompted Beef Products to suspend operations at plants in Amarillo, Texas; Waterloo, Iowa; and Kansas that cost nearly 700 jobs.

Loss of revenue over the controversy was a contributing factor in Cargill's shutdown of its plant in Plainview, Texas, that employed more than 2,000 people, although the tight cattle supply played a larger role in that decision, Cargill spokesman Mike Martin said Tuesday. Cargill also shut down a facility in Vernon, California, outside of Los Angeles that further processed the meat product.

BPI filed a lawsuit in 2012 against ABC News and others, saying that the network's coverage prompted consumer to shun the product and led to the plant closures and layoffs. BPI said it lost 80 percent of its business in 28 days.

BPI hasn't said exactly how much sales have rebounded.

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