

March 15, 2021

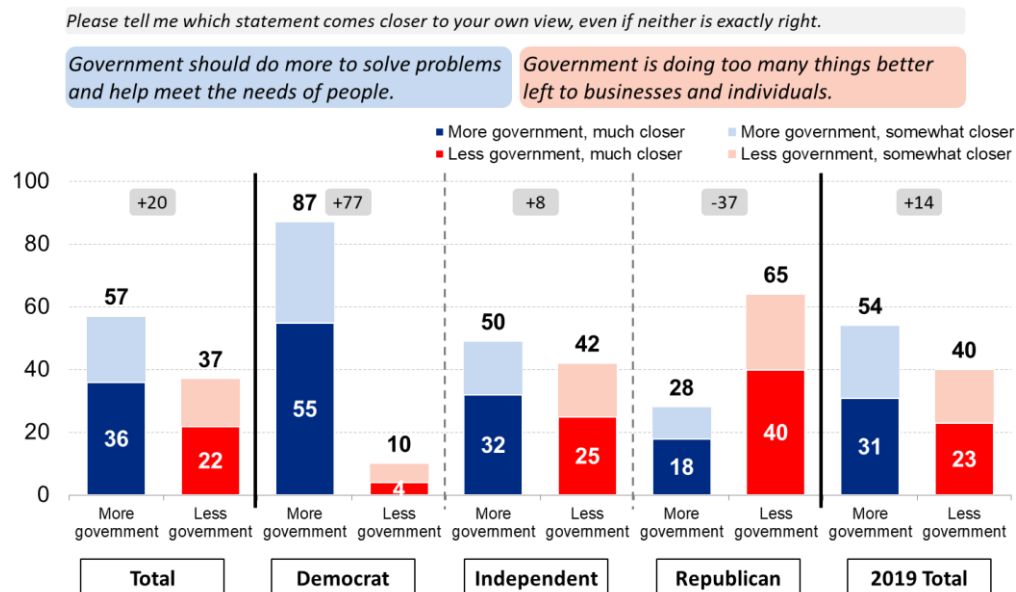
Voters expect more from Federal Government and Industry to keep agricultural workers safe

To: Interested Parties

From: GQR

Through the largest public health crisis in a century, Americans yearn for more government action to solve problems and help people. The government's pandemic response packages are generally not enough, especially when it comes to the agricultural industry. In a national poll conducted before the election, registered voters are adamant the government needs to do more for workers, including enacting the APHA policy statements to make agricultural workplaces safer, create stronger limits on factory farms and concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), and take more vigorous oversight of waste produced by industrial farms.¹

Figure 1: Voters believe government needs to be doing more

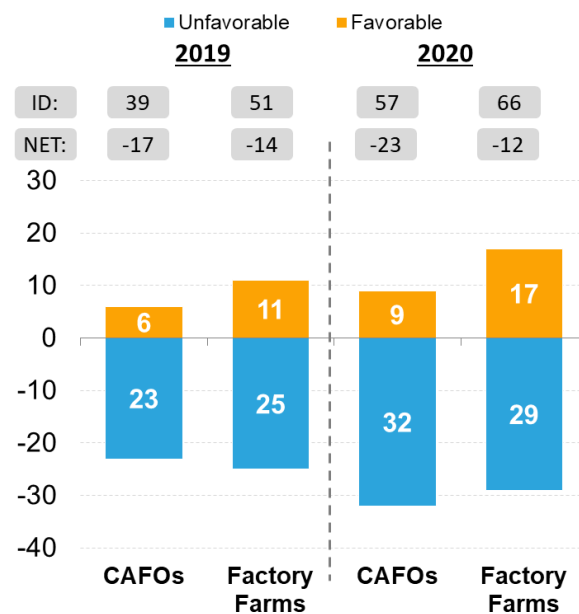


¹ On behalf of the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, GQR conducted a national poll of 800 registered voters September 17-27, 2020. The poll was conducted via live telephone interviewing. The margin of error is +/- 3.46 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence interval. Margin of error is higher among subgroups. While these data are a few months old, there is little evidence in other public polls to suggest radical changes in public opinion. One possibility is different partisan breakdowns given the change in the Presidency. We directly note in the memo where we believe this may have an impact.

CAFOs and Factory Farming

The agricultural industry is growing in importance to voters over the course of the pandemic. Nearly two thirds of voters (64 percent) now say industrial animal farming is ‘very important’ to the national economy -- up 6 points since 2019. But, voters’ views on the industry are souring. More voters are able to offer opinions on ‘CAFOs’ and ‘factory farms’ than in 2019, but both are unpopular. ‘CAFOs’ are now known to 57 percent of voters (up from 39 percent in 2019) and just 9 percent of voters view them favorably to 32 percent unfavorably. This is not just Democrats. Independents and Republicans both view CAFOs negatively: 6-34 percent favorable-unfavorable and 12-20 percent favorable-unfavorable respectively.

Figure 2: Views on ‘CAFOs’ and ‘Factory Farms’ over time

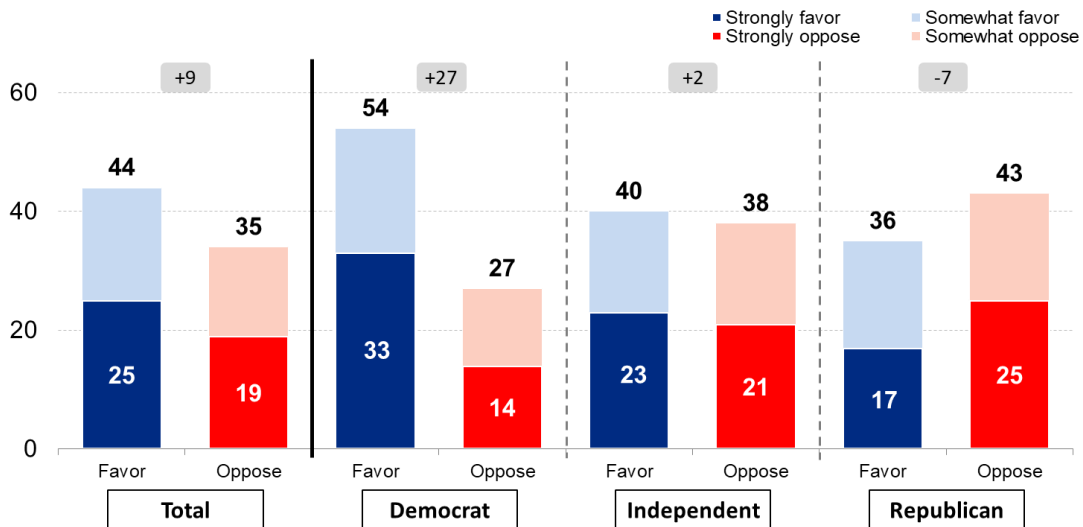


A majority of voters also believe industrial animal farms need more oversight (51 percent). While Democrats are a driving force for the oversight (67 percent want more), a majority of independents also believe there should be more oversight (53 percent), and even one third of Republicans support more government oversight (31 percent).

As we saw in our 2019 poll, a plurality of voters favor a national moratorium on new CAFOs: 44 percent favor, 35 percent oppose (43-38 percent in 2019). Women, Hispanics, and younger voters under the age of 50 are most supportive of a national moratorium. Notably, Republicans are trending toward a moratorium since 2019: 36-43 percent favor-oppose in 2020 compared to 30-49 percent in 2019.

Figure 3: National moratorium on new CAFOs

Some large industrial cattle, swine or poultry operations that have thousands of animals in one confined location are also called Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs. From what you may know, do you favor or oppose a national moratorium or ban on the creation of new CAFOs?



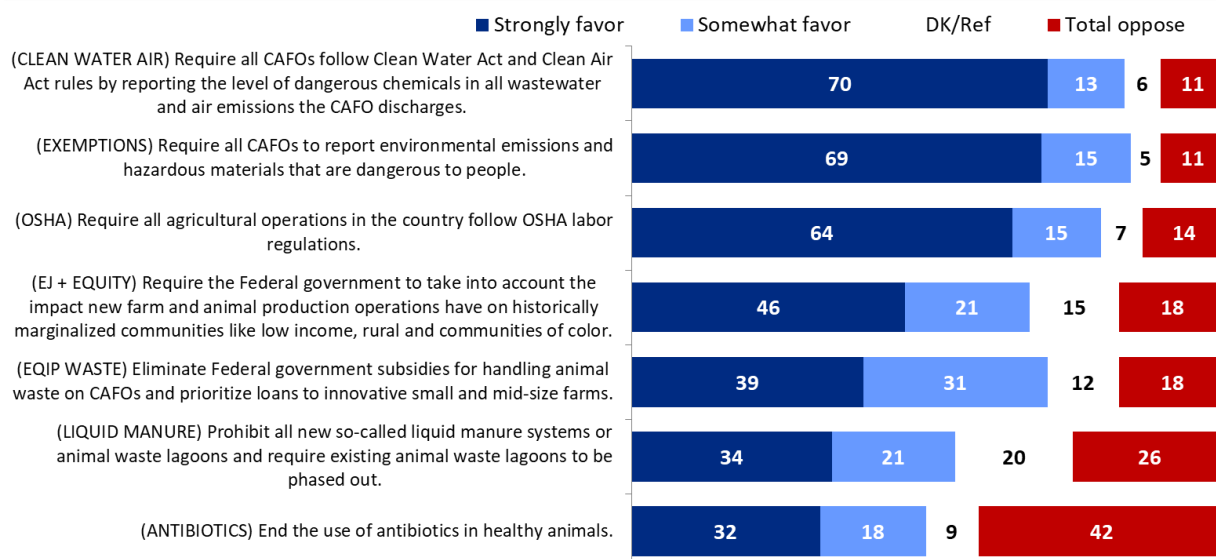
Voters strongly support nearly all of the APHA policy recommendations on industrial farming. Without an explanation, massive majorities of voters support requiring all CAFOs follow Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act rules on reporting dangerous chemicals in wastewater and air emissions, requiring CAFOs to report environmental emissions, requiring all agricultural operations in the country follow OSHA labor regulations, and requiring the Federal government to take into account the impact new farm and animal operations have on historically marginalized communities. Support for these policies cannot be overstated.

The only policy that divides voters is ending the use of antibiotics in healthy animals: voters split 50-42 percent favor-oppose. However, when voters are offered more information -- that antibiotic overuse in farm animals increases antibiotic resistant bacteria harmful to humans -- support increases to 65 percent.

Importantly, there is strong cross-partisan support for adherence to the Clean Air and Water Acts, requiring CAFOs report dangerous materials, and requiring agricultural operations follow OSHA regulations. Democrats and independents are fully behind requiring the government take into account the impact of new farm and animal production on historically marginalized communities; while Republicans are mixed (42 percent favor it).

Figure 4: Support for APHA recommendations for industrial farming

Now I am going to read you a series of short proposals some people have made regarding animal production and Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, or CAFOs. After I read each one please tell me if you favor or oppose that proposal.



Ag and COVID-19

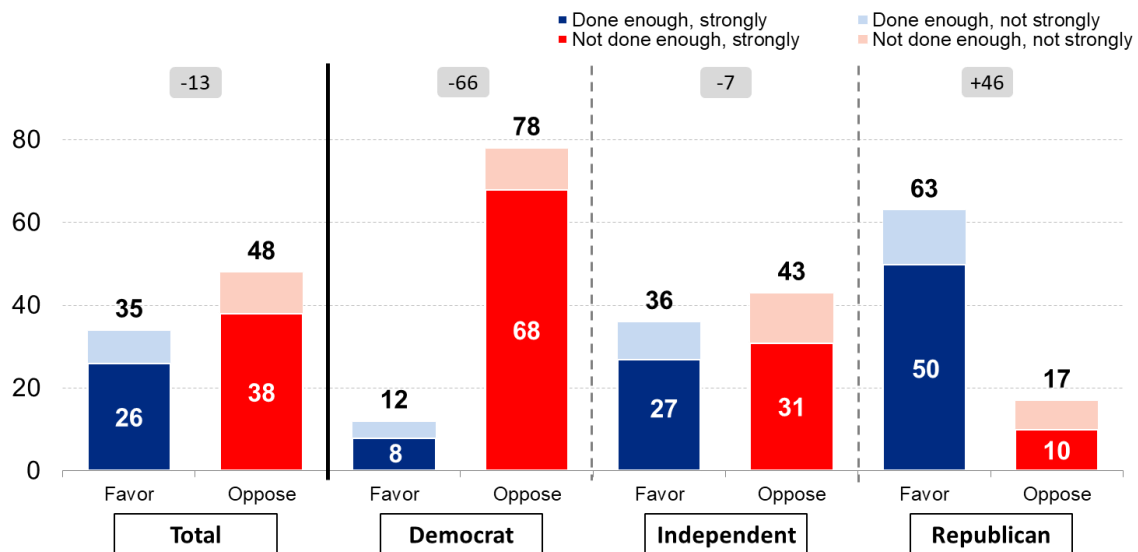
Voters generally approve of how the government is handling the food supply during the pandemic, but believe the government has not done enough to help and keep workers safe. There are stark racial divides in assessing the government's response.

Just over half of voters (54 percent) say the government has done enough to maintain strong food supply chains so grocery stores do not run out of necessary items (38 percent say the government has not done enough). At the time of this poll, just one third of Democrats said the government is doing enough, while three quarters of Republicans believe it is doing enough; 61 percent of independents also say it is doing enough. This poll was conducted prior to the 2020 election, when Republicans held the Presidency. It is likely these partisan breaks are markedly different, reflecting a change in government power.

However, voters do not believe the government has done enough to protect agricultural workers and workers who work in slaughterhouses from the virus. Just one third of voters say the government has done enough to protect these workers. While Democrats are least likely to say the government is doing enough, Republicans are less likely to give the government good marks on worker protection than on maintaining supply chains.

Figure 5: Federal Government is not doing enough to protect ag workers from virus

And do you think the Federal Government has done enough to protect agricultural workers and workers who work in slaughterhouses from the virus, or has the Federal government not done enough?



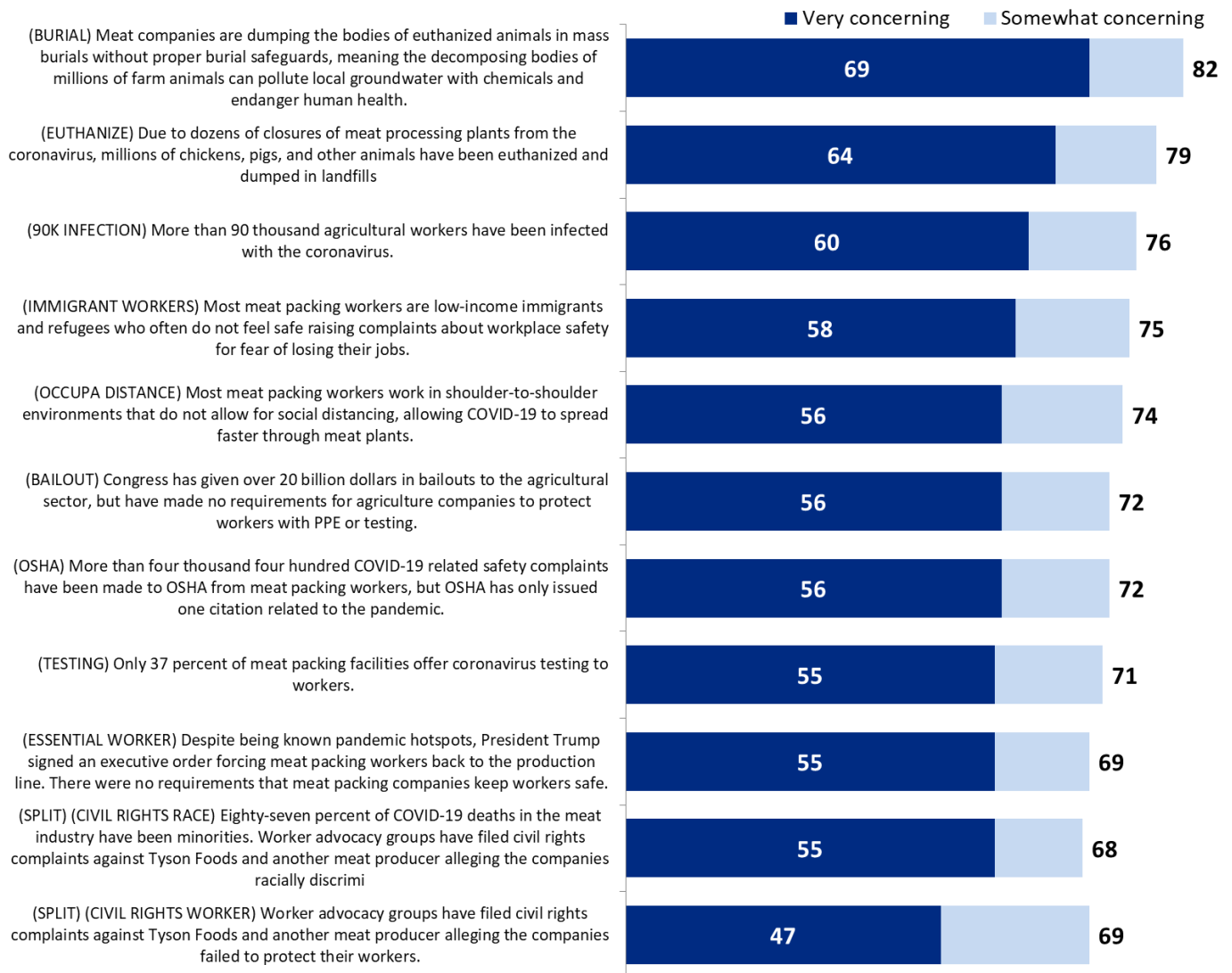
Unlike most of the rest of the data in our survey, there are large racial divides on the government's actions to protect workers from the virus. White voters are fairly mixed in their assessment (39 percent say the government has done enough, 45 percent say not enough). Though, there is a gender divide among white voters: white men say the government has done enough by a 44-39 percent margin and white women say the opposite (34-51 percent). Hispanic voters lean toward the government not doing enough (31-45 percent). Black voters strongly believe the government has not done enough (13-71 percent).

Black voters are also more likely to say the government has not done enough to protect food supply chains than either white or Hispanic voters.

When it comes to the direct impact of COVID-19 on the agricultural industry, voters are most concerned about the level of exposure and risk workers face and the mass deaths and burials of millions of animals. Voters clearly expect more from the industry. Large majorities of voters express serious concerns about meat companies euthanizing millions of animals and dumping those bodies in mass burial sites without proper safeguards, allowing for the pollution of groundwater. Voters are also deeply concerned that more than 90 thousand meat packing workers contracted COVID-19 and that the conditions in meat packing plants are not changing to meet CDC guidelines for social distancing.

Importantly, three quarters of voters recognize and express concern that meat packing workers are often low-income immigrants and refugees who do not feel safe raising complaints for fear of losing their jobs. And two thirds of voters are concerned that meat packing companies racially discriminated against workers of color, exacerbating COVID-19 among largely Black and Hispanic workforces.

Figure 6: Concerns about the meat packing industry



Conclusion

Industrial animal farming is viewed as an integral part to our nation's economy. As such, voters also expect the industry to do better by its workers and adhere to environmental, labor, and health regulations. Voters are deeply concerned to find out the industry's failings on each of these accounts during the pandemic and believe the federal government needs to be doing more to protect agricultural workers. Unlike other areas of polarization in the American electorate, there is relatively strong cross-partisan support for more government involvement to protect workers and for the meat packing industry to be held to the same standards as other companies.