

## **Jews launch new appeal for Iowa meat plant**

Nicole Neroulias Religion News Service | Sep. 11, 2009

Rebuffed after seeking a meeting with the new owners of an Iowa kosher meat plant that was devastated by an immigration raid last year, a social justice group is using the upcoming Jewish New Year to send a message from the marketplace.

The Agriprocessors plant in Postville, Iowa, now owned by SHF and called Agri Star, has scaled back production since a May 2008 raid arrested nearly 400 suspected illegal immigrants, including children, working in allegedly unsafe conditions.

Jewish Community Action, a nonprofit group that belongs to the Postville Community Benefit Alliance coalition of local and religious leaders, is distributing a Rosh Hashanah card that concerned Jews can print and send to new operator Daniel Hirsch.

"In the spirit of new beginnings, we hope you will accept a meeting with the Postville Community Benefits Alliance to develop an agreement that will ensure: the health and safety of the workforce, strong and open lines of communication with the town, much business success and renewed consumer confidence," the card reads.

Hirsch, who could not be reached for comment, has said he is currently too busy turning the bankrupt business around to meet with the group. According to a Sept. 9 article in the New York-based Forward newspaper, which has closely followed this story, Agri Star representatives are concerned about demands for a binding legal agreement, though coalition members say they simply want to ensure that employees are treated legally and fairly.

"This is a new year, a new beginning, it's an opportunity for a new start," said Jane Ramsey, executive director of Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, which also belongs to the Postville alliance.

"It's in Hirsch's interest and Agri Star's interest to send a message that this is not just a new company, but is going to operate with the highest ethical standards and with great transparency and with great concerns for the community of Postville and for its customers around the country."

Members of the Rubashkin family, which founded the company, and several former supervisors face criminal charges for the alleged immigration and child labor violations. The federal trial, postponed to accommodate the Jewish holidays, will begin Oct. 13 in Sioux Falls, S.D.

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