

Dean Foods to close Huntley plant by late September

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July 10, 2018

Dean Foods in Huntley is closing in September, a village official confirmed Monday.

The shuttering of the Huntley dairy plant and office facility will cause 131 people to lose their jobs, according to a Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act letter sent by Dean's, which said that layoffs are set to begin Sept. 14 and continue to Sept. 28.

"First and foremost, there is the unfortunate impact that they are losing their positions at the local facility," Huntley Village Manager Dave Johnson said. "Overall, from an economic development standpoint we never like to see that."

The facility, 11713 Mill St., is one of several that Dean Foods plans to shut down this year. The company cited decreased dairy consumption trends and a highly competitive industry as "significant challenges" in 2017, according to the Dean Foods 2017 annual investors report.

"The challenges faced in 2017 served as a catalyst to drive a sense of urgency around programmatic and structural changes in the second half of the year and into 2018," officials wrote in the report.

Employees questioned by the Northwest Herald on Monday evening expressed deep disappointment but declined to comment.

In March 2016, Walmart announced plans to build its own 250,000-square-foot milk processing plant in Indiana. This was a hit to Dean Food's market base, according to the report.

"In connection with Walmart Inc.'s dairy processing plant in Indiana, we expect to lose approximately 60 million gallons of private label [milk] volume beginning in the second half of 2018, which squares to approximately 100 to 110 million gallons annually," Dean officials wrote.

The Texas-based corporation manufactures, markets and distributes dairy products such as milk, yogurt, cheese, cream and ice cream, including company and private label brands.

A call to Huntley's facility was directed to the corporate communications office.

The office didn't respond to numerous phone calls and an email requesting comment.

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