

Sugar lockout comes to sweet conclusion for employer

The 20-month-long American Crystal Sugar lockout is finally over. In April, 55% of the members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers Local 167G ratified a contract that closely resembles a deal they rejected on four previous votes.

The lockout began in August 2011 when 96% of the Moorhead-based company's employees rejected a pact that would have increased wages 13% over five years. However, it also demanded greater worker contributions to health insurance coverage. Each of four subsequent ballots over the last year and a half produced fewer "no" votes.

Several hundred workers quit or retired over the past 20 months. American Crystal Sugar predicted that replacement workers who filled in during the lockout would keep their jobs.

Federal law requires the locked-out workers to be returned to the same jobs (or equivalents) they held before the labor strife began.

Note: American Crystal Sugar did not substantially change its contract offer over the lockout period—a strategy that ultimately paid off.