



July 16, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

For well over a decade, we have been frequently reminded of the severe impacts and devastating realities that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has had on the entire country. To date, almost 100 million birds have been lost due to HPAI in the United States. The poultry and egg industry know all too well the challenges associated with this virus, and unfortunately in the current outbreak, HPAI has been detected beyond avian species to include wildlife, various mammalian species, and most recently in commercial dairy cattle. With these new detections in addition to the poultry industry's significant losses, we are asking USDA to increase its efforts in addressing this disease with a creative, collaborative, and science-based approach that bolsters both prevention and response while avoiding ramifications on American agricultural exports.

We believe that USDA leadership and additional support is critical for eradicating from the United States. As such, we urge USDA to establish a HPAI Strategic Initiative that engages subject matter experts within industry, universities, and government experts to expand our knowledge and develop novel methods to prevent, detect, and respond to this virus. This type of strategic approach has been used in the past for other complex problems that challenged American agriculture and is ultimately what the situation demands. By developing a HPAI Strategic Initiative, USDA would allocate funds and oversee an initiative that includes a series of research projects that address the outstanding questions related to prevention and response.

The poultry industry believes that the unique challenges associated with HPAI offer great opportunity for the American agricultural research community to take a global leadership role. With the prevalent nature of the current strain, both in the U.S. and around the world, HPAI is an animal health and welfare challenge in need of a targeted solution. It is imperative that we collectively work to eliminate the disease which would minimize the financial impacts on taxpayers, sustain the global food supply, and alleviate the emotional burden on hardworking poultry farmers. We need the help and assistance of the USDA in creating an HPAI Strategic initiative that will research and identify solutions for HPAI challenges related to:

- Advanced and more effective biosecurity practices targeted to specific species and production methods
- Effective wild bird deterrents
- More efficient depopulation methods and bird disposal processes
- Better understanding of routes of transmission of the virus
- Expanded research on vaccine safety and efficacy, coupled with a scientifically validated, risk-based surveillance strategy
- Strategies to modernize international trade approaches

¹"Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response Plan." USDA APHIS | Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), May 2017, www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/emergency-management/hpai/fadprep-hpai.

The poultry and egg industries learned a great deal in the 2014-2015 outbreak specifically as it relates to biosecurity. The cost of the 2014-2015 outbreak was over \$3.3 billion.¹ The current outbreak, which began in 2022 and continues today, will easily surpass the 2014-2015 outbreak in terms of cost, impact to farmers and growers, impact to processors, and ultimately the taxpayer. To reduce costs, USDA plans to move forward with an a new HPAI biosecurity audit that will tie certain benchmarks in biosecurity to indemnity payments. It's imperative that USDA also proactively search for solutions to assist the poultry industry with preventing new introductions and reduce the burden of disease.

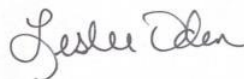
We also want to express the need to preserve all U.S. export markets for both poultry products and poultry genetics while conducting this critically important research – particularly as it pertains to vaccines. It is vital that the U.S. remain a world leader in poultry exports and disruptions in trade must be avoided. Such disruptions could be equally devastating as the presence of the virus itself to our birds, our family farmers, our producers, and ultimately the consumers of poultry and egg products worldwide. Therefore, USDA must also remain dedicated to engaging with our international partners to ensure our trade agreements reflect the new realities of a world that is constantly combating HPAI before a vaccine strategy could be implemented.

We would like to express our gratitude to the USDA staff who have been involved in the outbreak response and wish to stress the importance of maintaining or improving trade agreements that will allow us to preserve export markets for poultry and eggs. USDA's efforts are to be commended. USDA and industry both play a critical role in eradicating HPAI. focusing on key research needs together will lead to much needed answers and solutions to mitigate this virus, ending the current outbreak, and preventing future outbreaks. We stand ready to work collaboratively with USDA on further outlining and prioritizing the necessary research objectives needed to answer the complex questions associated with HPAI prevention, detection, and response.

Respectfully submitted,



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¹"Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response Plan." USDA APHIS | Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), May 2017, www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/emergency-management/hpai/fadprep-hpai.

National Chicken Council

The National Chicken Council (NCC) is the national, non-profit trade association whose primary purpose is to serve as the advocate and voice for the U.S. broiler chicken industry in Washington, D.C. NCC member companies include chicken producer/processors, poultry distributors, and allied industry firms. The producer/processors account for approximately 95% of the chickens produced in the United States.

National Turkey Federation

The National Turkey Federation (NTF) represents all segments of the turkey industry, including growers, processors, breeders, hatchery owners and allied companies. NTF is the only national trade association exclusively representing the turkey industry; our members account for more than 95 percent of all U.S. turkey production.

United Egg Producers

United Egg Producers (UEP) was created in 1968 as an Agriculture Farmer Cooperative. Although the membership is voluntary, UEP represents approximately 90% of the egg production in the U.S. on issues ranging from animal health and biosecurity, animal welfare, food safety, environment, and government relations.

USA Poultry & Egg Export Council (USAPEEC)

USAPEEC was established in 1985 and through its network of 16 international offices and consultants in key global markets, USAPEEC keeps current on issues that directly impact U.S. poultry and egg exports. Although USAPEEC's mission is to promote exports of U.S. poultry and eggs worldwide, the Council has evolved into an association that advocates for the industry on trade policy issues.

U.S. Poultry & Egg Association

The U.S. Poultry & Egg Association is the world's largest and most active poultry organization. We represent the entire industry as an "All Feather" association. Membership includes producers and processors of broilers, turkeys, ducks, eggs, and breeding stock, as well as allied companies. Formed in 1947, the association has affiliations in 27 states and member companies worldwide.

¹"Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Response Plan." USDA APHIS | Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), May 2017, www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/emergency-management/hpai/fadprep-hpai.