

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 12, 2015

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As you know, Iowa is currently coping with an outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) that is devastating to the turkey and egg industries. An estimated 23 million birds in Iowa will need to be depopulated from farm sites to control the spread of this disease.

Poultry growers in the state of Iowa whose operations have been affected by the virus have communicated to us several measures that could help their businesses recover from the outbreak. As the U.S. Department of Agriculture continues its collaboration with state agencies on the HPAI response and prepares for the future, we urge consideration of the suggestions we have received from our constituents who are struggling with the impact of the virus. USDA must do everything it can to stop this perilous virus.

We have heard from numerous producers in Iowa who are concerned about adequate resources being dispatched to the state. Specifically, producers have raised concerns about the outbreaks in the last two weeks that have overwhelmed the current capacity to humanely euthanize infected flocks to prevent further spread of the disease. As this crisis continues to unfold, we urge USDA to consider ways to expedite humane depopulation processes, possibly allowing qualified non-USDA personnel like local veterinarians to oversee the depopulation of flocks.

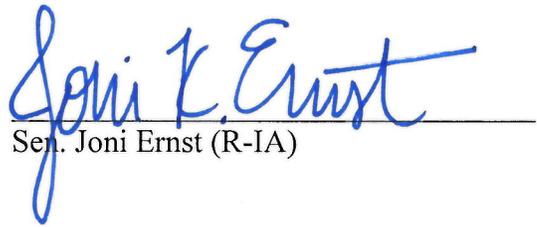
We are also concerned about the reports from producers who do not know when they will be able to repopulate their flocks after completing USDA's five step process for containing the disease. We urge USDA to work with state agencies to communicate to farmers a timeline so they can make plans for the future operations and in some cases work out their financing needs.

As the HPAI virus continues to impact Iowa farmers, it is critical that we do all we can to prepare for future outbreaks. We understand there are companies working on a vaccine for HPAI, and we hope the Department is exploring ways to expedite development and commercialization of those vaccines should they show promise of stopping this virus. USDA must prioritize research and education on avian influenza.

This outbreak of HPAI has already devastated the Iowa turkey and egg industry, and will have a trickle-down effect on the rural communities and our country's agricultural economy. Farmers are eager to return to business as usual and minimize the disruption to their businesses – We look forward to hearing from you soon on how we can work together to eradicate this deadly disease. Thank you for all your work, and for your consideration.

Sincerely,


Sen. Charles Grassley (R-IA)


Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA)