

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 4, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts:

We are writing to request you hold a hearing to examine the federal government's response to the ongoing outbreak of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) strain, also known as H5N2. It is important the hearing take place in a timely manner, following containment of the virus, so that we do not divert key personnel from efforts to keep it from spreading further.

This strain of HPAI is a highly infectious and fatal disease for poultry, first detected in the U.S. in December 2014. To date, the virus has decimated turkey, chicken, and other poultry flocks, which account for nearly 45 million birds in 15 states. In Iowa alone, we have already seen roughly 30 million birds impacted. Although growers and government officials have employed strict biosecurity measures to combat the spread of the virus, new cases continue to develop on a near daily basis. Family farms, which depend on the predictable lifecycle of birds, are left with empty barns and questions regarding their future.

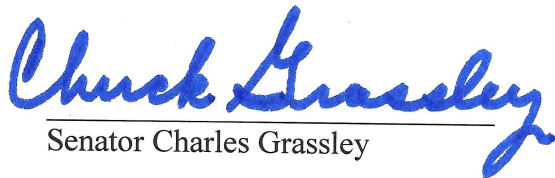
As a result, the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, in partnership with relevant state agencies, has been working extensively to identify ways to stop the spread of the disease, clean and disinfect barns, and dispose of all compromised materials. However, due to the sheer size and scope of this outbreak, we have heard from countless folks in Iowa who are concerned about the lack of certainty caused by this situation – many of whom just want to find resolution to this tragedy and get back to work.

Additional concern has centered on the complexity of the indemnification process, and the overlapping levels of agreements required for a grower with an impacted site to get depopulated, materials removed, facility disinfected and compensated for loss of birds. While state and federal agencies are working closely together, an event of this scope has exposed some flaws in the response plans and indemnity calculations for different types of producers.

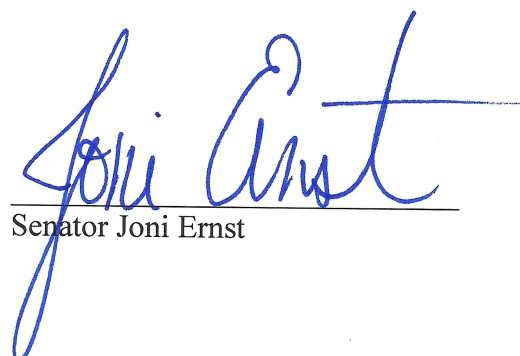
As you know, it is crucial for the vitality of our agricultural economy that key stakeholders – producers, ancillary industries, community leaders, and government officials – have the tools and lines of communication available to work with one another to overcome challenges such as HPAI. A hearing would provide an opportunity to bring these leaders and stakeholders together to review what has happened, identify what response procedures have worked, what has not worked, and set the stage to ensure we are better prepared in the future.

Thank you for your time and attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Senator Charles Grassley



Senator Joni Ernst