

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 25, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We write today with concern about the rapidly spreading H5N1 strain of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), which has recently been confirmed at two turkey operations, an egg-laying facility, and multiple dairy farms in the state of Iowa. We urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to continue working alongside state leaders to provide adequate relief to affected producers and assist in disease research and response.

Iowa is a leader in both poultry and dairy production, contributing significantly to our domestic food security. Farmers continue to drive economic growth, supply good-paying jobs, and serve as a lifeline for our rural communities. However, the spread of HPAI threatens not only the livelihoods of our producers, but also the stability of our local economies and the broader food supply chain. While our farmers have been grappling with the spread of HPAI among commercial poultry populations for some time, the recent developments of the virus infecting dairy cattle demand immediate and significant attention. Infection among livestock not only complicates containment efforts but also increases the risk of HPAI affecting a broader spectrum of farms in our state.

In order to combat this growing threat, Iowa has become the first state to proactively implement biosecurity protocols and testing measures for infected dairy farms, similar to those already in place for poultry sites that test positive. To build on these efforts, additional resources from the USDA are necessary to support impacted poultry and dairy farmers, reinforce state response measures, and provide backing for disease research. We would specifically ask that the USDA deliver the following:

1. A Streamlined Process for Farmers to be Compensated for Production Loss and Receive Indemnity: Impacted dairy sites need a one-stop-shop for resources. Currently, support is planned to come from both USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA). We would request that the USDA establish one point of contact for a more streamlined process that will alleviate the administrative burden on our farmers, allowing them to focus on recovery and prevention efforts.
2. Compensation for Culled Dairy Cattle at Fair Market Value: The federal testing order and movement restrictions can severely impact the value of cull cattle, necessitating fair compensation for impacted producers. We would emphasize that affected cull dairy cattle must receive fair market value to maintain the financial stability of our dairy farmers.

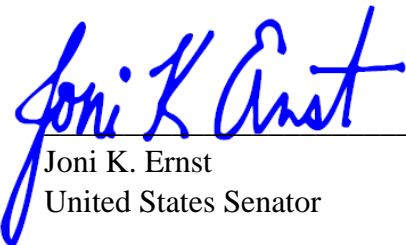
3. Compensation for Lost Milk Production at a Minimum of 90 Percent of Fair Market Value: While we welcome USDA's announcement to use the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP) to compensate dairies that test positive, it is crucial that the rules are finalized promptly and local FSA staff receive appropriate training. This timely support will help ensure our dairy producers can continue to operate without devastating financial losses.
4. Revision of Poultry Indemnity Tables to Reflect the Fair Market Value of Impacted Birds: The revised indemnity tables do not represent the true value of egg layers. We would request the USDA return to the previous formula that indexes bird values to table egg values. This will provide proper compensation to sustain our poultry industry when impacted by HPAI outbreaks.
5. Accelerate and Focus on Research to Strengthen Producer Mitigation Strategies: A deeper understanding of how HPAI is spreading from farm to farm, the duration of the virus' presence on a farm, the potential for cattle reinfection, and the effectiveness of various biosecurity strategies are all essential for mitigating the spread in our state. Additionally, research, development, and approval of vaccines are urgently needed. We ask that the USDA focus on research in each of these areas to provide our producers with the knowledge and tools they need to prevent future outbreaks.

We urge the USDA to fill the outstanding resource gaps. However, we also would like to express our appreciation for the work already underway. Thus far, the authorization of additional epidemiological strike teams and wildlife personnel have already been deployed to our state. Their expertise and continued presence are essential for our dairy and poultry producers alike.

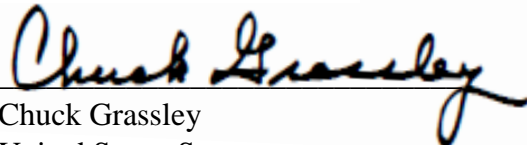
It goes without saying, the USDA's partnership and collaborative efforts are critical for navigating this challenging time and protecting the resiliency of Iowa's agricultural sector. As HPAI continues to spread, ensuring our producers and state leaders have the tools necessary to mitigate the ongoing threat must remain a top priority for the USDA, especially when working towards complete eradication of the disease.

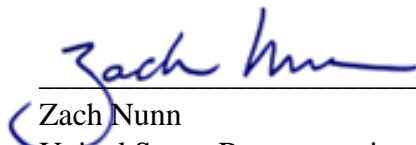
Thank you for your prompt consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

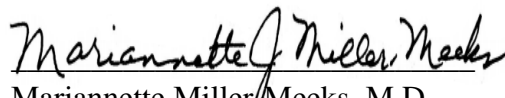

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