

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 18, 2024

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to express our strong support of the United States evaluating the potential usage of a Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) vaccine to address the current outbreak and future incidences of HPAI. As you know, U.S. officials will be required to negotiate with major trade partners before allowing any poultry producers to make use of a HPAI vaccine without impacting export ability. Any delay in these discussions has the potential to slow the roll out of a new vaccine. We therefore request the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) work proactively with the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to resolve potential trade disputes while continuing to support a robust research program related to vaccine efficacy and a surveillance program.

As you are aware, avian influenza outbreaks continue to pose a significant threat to domestic poultry populations. A high influx of migratory birds on the northern plains has exacerbated the spread of this disease. In South Dakota alone, the outbreak has impacted more than 5.3 million birds. With new cases being detected in recent weeks, it is apparent that this disease will continue to devastate flocks of domestic poultry.

We recognize that without updated trade agreements, the use of HPAI vaccination can put our poultry and egg industry at a disadvantage, so now is the time to begin the tedious work of talking with our trading partners to solidify agreements that reflect the new reality. While we recognize trade considerations will impact any potential vaccine roll out, it is important for USDA to consider the needs of all producers and prioritize animal health.

It is our understanding that USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is currently in the process of testing new vaccines to address the latest HPAI strain. We are hopeful about the benefits of the vaccines being developed, but we remain concerned that the important work of updating the trade agreements will not keep up with the scientific advancements. As HPAI vaccine research continues, we respectfully request animal health and trade leaders give special consideration to impacted producers.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

CC: United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai

Sincerely,



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



John Thune
United States Senator