

April 10, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

I write again regarding the ongoing highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak that continues to devastate our nation's poultry flocks and dairy herds. The disease has repeatedly disrupted domestic and global agricultural markets and strained household budgets since 2022. Emergency disease response has been expensive for American farmers and taxpayers, and down the chain, American consumers have been burdened by high costs at the grocery store. The Administration must follow through with its promises in "USDA's Five-Pronged Approach to Address Avian Flu," including by finalizing an avian influenza vaccine policy that maintains markets for American farmers. These actions must include strong agency coordination with agricultural, animal health, environmental and public health industries.

Continued outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza have resulted in the loss of over 200 million birds nationwide since February 2022, including 11.6 million birds on Wisconsin farms. In the last two months, Wisconsin has experienced three major outbreaks in commercial poultry flocks, affecting more than 4.3 million egg-laying hens. This past December, Wisconsin reported its first confirmed case of the disease in dairy cattle through the National Milk Testing Strategy. Exposures typically tied to poultry and dairy operations have resulted in 71 human cases of avian influenza across the U.S., including one confirmed case in Wisconsin and two deaths nationwide.

Despite USDA-backed biosecurity measures, migrating wild birds continue to infect domestic poultry flocks and dairy cattle across the U.S., making clear that existing containment strategies are insufficient. Spring migration patterns are expected to increase cases through May, often impacting poultry flocks with egg-laying hens. These recent outbreaks could potentially repeat the alarming egg prices seen in 2025, which peaked at \$6 per dozen. Repeated supply shocks to markets have increased grocery costs across the country, hurting American consumers when affordability concerns are at an all-time high.

Farmworkers also take financial hits from these outbreaks. Just this past month, 87 employees have been laid off at two Wisconsin farms following the depopulation of their flocks due to avian influenza. It is estimated that these individuals will be without work for five to seven months while the farms repopulate their flocks. Unfortunately, this is not the first time Wisconsin farmers have had to temporarily close their doors and lay off workers, and if the USDA continues to slow walk its approach in addressing avian influenza, this will certainly not be the last.

The Administration has yet to make meaningful progress towards the avian influenza vaccine response called for in USDA's Five-Pronged Approach to Address Avian Flu. While the USDA funded \$100 million for its "HPAI Poultry Innovation Grand Challenge," which included investments to develop novel vaccines, in the fourth year of the avian influenza outbreak, there has been no movement to stand up a vaccine pilot program. At the same time, USDA has spent roughly \$2.5 billion compensating farmers for their extensive losses. Payments for outbreak response snowball while the status quo continues. American farmers, taxpayers and consumers cannot continue to absorb these costs.

I once again urge the Trump Administration to deliver on its pledge to address avian influenza, including by following through on a nationwide avian influenza vaccination policy. Agriculture and public health stakeholders are calling for a comprehensive and coordinated response to avian influenza. As the outbreak continues, farmers and consumers deserve a response that matches the rising scale and pressing urgency of this outbreak.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy Baldwin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator