

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 27, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write today to express my deep concern about the impact of the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) on poultry farmers suffering economic losses and all Americans who are paying exorbitant prices for eggs. I want to thank the Department for its response to this crisis and request a briefing as detailed below.

On January 19, The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) confirmed the first commercial poultry flock with HPAI in Virginia. As a result, 25,000 birds were depopulated.¹ I sincerely appreciate the Department's work with VDACS and industry partners to deploy a joint incidence response.

HPAI has led to the death of about 58 million birds in the United States since the start of 2022.² These deaths cause severe disruptions to the egg supply chain and economic losses for poultry farmers. While poultry farmers receive USDA payments for the birds and eggs lost due to an outbreak, farmers are not compensated for birds that die before the confirmation of HPAI or for lost income from barns and hen houses being idle after an outbreak.

HPAI outbreaks across the country have impacted the national egg supply and contributed significantly to rising egg prices. Over the last year, many Americans have experienced sticker shock at the grocery store as the price of eggs has skyrocketed. Some stores have even capped the number of cartons that customers can buy due to shortages.³ In 2022, the price of eggs rose more than any other grocery item. As of December 2022, the price of eggs was up nearly 60 percent compared to December of the previous year.⁴ As a mother of three children, I know how important this nutritious food staple can be to families, and how fast a family can go through a carton of eggs. These costs add up for families.

I respectfully request a Congressional briefing on the Department's efforts to provide relief to farmers whose flocks have been impacted, as well as the Department's efforts to prepare other poultry farmers on the appropriate biosecurity efforts to protect their flocks. In addition, the briefing should clarify to whether the Department requires additional funding or authorities from Congress to respond to these outbreaks and provide robust support to state agencies and industry partners.

American poultry farmers across the country work hard to ensure we have a robust domestic supply of chicken, turkey, and eggs. I appreciate the Department's work to contain these outbreaks, prevent future outbreaks, make impacted farmers whole, and lower egg and poultry prices for Americans. Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working together on this priority issue.

Sincerely,

¹ <https://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/press-releases-230119-hpai.shtml>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/egg-prices-shortage-avian-flu-11673629381>

³ <https://www.businessinsider.com/these-states-have-seen-the-highest-increases-in-egg-prices-2023-1>

⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/egg-prices-shortage-avian-flu-11673629381>


Abigail Davis Spanberger
Member of Congress