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COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
JOINT ECONOMIC

February 7, 2025

Ms. Brooke Rollins
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary-designee Rollins:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plays a critical role in maintaining a safe, affordable food system for American families and in supporting robust domestic and foreign markets for American farmers. As you acknowledged at your confirmation hearing, one of your top priorities is to quickly and thoroughly assess and manage the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI or H5N1) outbreak. The current HPAI outbreak is stressing poultry and egg producers' ability to make a living, stretching the USDA's budget through increasing indemnity payments to depopulate farms, and forcing working families to pay more at the grocery store. It is clear that the American tax payer and the American consumer are now paying twice for the same problem. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the average price for a dozen large grade A eggs jumped by 65 percent in 2024, from \$2.52 to \$4.15. As of February 2025, prices are around \$7 per carton and the USDA Economic Research Service predicts that egg prices will continue to rise in 2025.

As a U.S. Senator and member of the Appropriations Committee, my constituents have asked me to hold President Trump accountable for his promise to lower food prices for all Americans. The USDA has many tools at its disposal to combat rising prices, including HPAI vaccines. Vaccinating all laying hens in the United States against HPAI will help lower egg prices for consumers, decrease production losses for farmers, and ultimately decrease the cost to taxpayers through reduced indemnity payments. While there are some technical, logistic, and trade related obstacles to the widespread vaccination of U.S. poultry flocks, there is an emerging consensus within the producer community that such action is necessary and you are seeking to join an Administration that prides itself on extracting concessions from trading partners. I request that you respond in writing within two weeks with your plan to lower egg and poultry prices for consumers through vaccination efforts, while preserving export markets for American farmers. Specifically, I would like your answers to the following questions:

- **Your Plan to Lower Prices:** Please share in detail your plan to lower egg and poultry prices through vaccination efforts and other means, including a complete vaccination strategy, use case, and plan to procure, stockpile, distribute, deploy, administer, and track the use of poultry H5N1 vaccines.

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- **Deployment Considerations:** What considerations need to be weighed while deploying H5N1 vaccinations to all laying hens in domestic egg production? Please provide specifics about how you propose to prioritize certain flocks or regions based on risk and export profile to maximize reductions in cost paid by American consumers for poultry and egg products?
- **Better Trade Agreements for American Farmers:** Once you have reviewed our poultry trade agreements in consultation with the US Trade Representative (USTR), please provide a plan that describes the actions the Administration will take to renegotiate trade agreements to permit the export of poultry and poultry products derived from birds that have been vaccinated. American farmers who want to keep their livelihoods intact and prices affordable for American families will look to you and the USTR to quickly renegotiate important trade agreements to maintain and expand foreign markets.
- **USDA Research Plan:** What is your plan for the USDA research that is needed to best match vaccines to the current strain of the virus and to expand production and deployment of effective vaccinations for poultry against all currently circulating variants of H5N1?
- **Vaccination Logistics:** How will you handle the logistics and costs associated with vaccination as well as enhanced surveillance and monitoring of flocks in a way that lowers prices for the American consumer?
- **Budget:** What budget will you assign to the USDA's efforts to manage the HPAI outbreak and lower egg and poultry prices for families, including through vaccination and other means?

I welcome your urgent attention to these questions. I look forward to learning more about your plan to bring down food prices for American families, support domestic producers, maintain export markets, and tackle this highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreak.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator