

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 8, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write with concern about the rapid spread of the H5N1 Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) virus that has been confirmed in 19 commercial turkey flocks and 2 backyard flocks in 11 counties across Minnesota, already killing over a million birds.

These are the first positive HPAI cases in Minnesota since the 2015 outbreak that killed 9 million birds and resulted in nearly \$650 million in economic losses. As the number one turkey producing state in the country, we are extremely concerned about the potential impact to the poultry industry should this outbreak of HPAI continue to spread.

In order to contain the virus and minimize economic disruptions to Minnesota farmers and rural communities, we respectfully urge the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to allow for flexibility when farmers receive the devastating news that they have an infected flock. Being able to quickly contain infected birds to stop the spread of the virus and responsibly restock barns that are within a control zone are critical steps in helping this important sector of Minnesota's agricultural economy.

The 2015 outbreak—the largest poultry health disaster in U.S. history—had a catastrophic impact on Minnesota poultry producers and processors, who make up about 6 percent of the state's agricultural economy. Since that time, the 2018 Farm Bill authorized a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant program to fund forward-looking disease prevention activities, laboratory capacity for surveillance and diagnostics, and rapid response capabilities. Those resources, combined with the experience gained from that earlier outbreak, have better prepared and informed the initial on-the-ground efforts since testing confirmed the recent positive cases. The new Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory that opened in 2016 has played a critical role in enhancing the ability to quickly diagnose and confirm positive cases in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

Yet Minnesota poultry farmers and rural communities are rightfully sensitive to the threat that this HPAI outbreak poses to their businesses and our country's agricultural economy. That is why we respectfully ask that you take the following actions to assist them during this outbreak.

First, we ask that APHIS provide flexibility when farmers with positive tests seek approval to quickly contain infected birds and restock barns with new animals. Second, we ask for continued vigilance and cooperation with state and local partners on testing, surveillance, and prevention

activities to ensure that this outbreak does not continue to spread and cause additional economic damage. Lastly, APHIS should be proactive in negotiating with our trading partners to ensure open trade access is maintained for non-infected poultry flocks through regionalization agreements.

We greatly appreciate USDA's rapid response to this emergency and the cooperative working relationship that has been established between federal and state officials. We stand ready to work with you and your staff on these timely actions that will help contain this outbreak and minimize disruptions to Minnesota's farmers and rural communities.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator