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COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING
APPROPRIATIONS

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

March 6, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW, Washington D.C.

The Honorable Kristi Noem
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
1880 2nd St SW, Washington D.C.

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW, Washington D.C.

The Honorable Jamieson Greer
Ambassador
U.S. Trade Representative
600 17th St NW, Washington D.C.

Dear Secretary Rollins, Secretary Noem, Secretary Kennedy, and Ambassador Greer

As the United States enters its third year of containing the H5N1 strain of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), it is imperative that the federal government continue to aggressively combat the spread of this deadly disease. With more than 150 million birds already culled, including 100,000 birds at one farm on Long Island alone, this outbreak does not appear to be slowing down.¹ Human infections, including a fatal case in Louisiana, and a new strain of the disease discovered in a dairy herd in Nevada, demonstrate the ongoing and increasing risk this influenza is posing to animal and human health.² Agencies must work together on comprehensive response efforts including vaccine development, publishing current scientific data, and proactive engagement with our international trading partners.

On January 31, 2025, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service confirmed a new genotype of HPAI, Genotype D1.1, identified in a dairy farm in Nevada.³ This is the first time in which there is clear, genetic confirmation that dairy cattle derived the virus from birds. As the virus

¹ [Long Island farm forced to euthanize more than 100,000 ducks after bird flu detected - ABC News](#)

² <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/05/health/bird-flu-cattle-nevada/index.html>

³ <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/news/program-update/aphis-confirms-d11-genotype-dairy-cattle-nevada-0>

evolves, it will make it more difficult to control the spread amongst wild birds, commercial poultry flocks, and dairy farms. In addition, an evolving virus could potentially lead to increased infections among humans, particularly farmworkers who interact with the animals daily. While the poultry industry has robust biosecurity measures to reduce the spread of HPAI in their operations, it seems that these measures are not adequate in combatting this highly virulent strain. The strategies used to combat the 2015 avian flu epidemic (i.e. increased biosecurity precautions) do not seem to be enough to counteract this strain.⁴

Engagement with the scientific community is the cornerstone of disease prevention and mitigation. It is extremely alarming that the weekly Morbidity and Mortality Report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, released on February 5, 2025, did not have any mention of H5N1 and did not contain any publicly available information on the risks associated with this virus. While data seemed to have been briefly included in the Morbidity and Mortality Report, it is no longer included in versions available online.⁵ Reports indicate that mistakenly reported data included indications there has been transmission of H5N1 between cats and humans, specifically those that share the same household.⁶ The midst of a potential public health crisis is not the time to hide information from the broader scientific community. The refusal to share this data will stifle critical vaccine development.

Unfortunately, inoculating poultry against HPAI, especially operations that are free-range, is extremely difficult. This outbreak of HPAI will require novel solutions in terms of vaccine delivery, such as additions to water or feed, as direct vaccine injection is not feasible on larger commercial operations. The income lost for poultry farmers can be immense if they must cull their flock. For example, egg-laying operations must wait at least 17 weeks before the animal is providing product, meaning farmers could be out of income for up to 5 months. Additionally broiler chickens have a much shorter lifespan, meaning they must be vaccinated at a younger age. It is critical that the federal government use all resources available to rapidly develop and deploy these new vaccine strategies. The United States Department of Agriculture and the Department of Homeland Security must work closely together to use all possible resources at shared facilities, such as Plum Island or the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, to develop these new treatments for chickens, turkeys, and dairy cows.

While vaccines are being developed, the United States Trade Representative must proactively engage with our international trading partners regarding the usage of newly developed vaccines. Public-private engagement will be critical to inform vaccination guidance to ensure our agricultural communities have access to these critical foreign markets.

In summation I request monthly written updates on the following items:

1. What coordination actions have been undertaken by the Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Homeland Security, and the U.S. Trade Representative.

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/02/nx-s1-5282389/avian-bird-flu-eggs-prices-cull-usda-michigan-poultry-influenza-farmer-vaccination-h5n1>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/06/health/cdc-bird-flu-cats-people.html>

⁶ Ibid.

2. The status of vaccine development for HPAI.
3. The interactions with international trading partners in terms of vaccine development.
4. Actions taken by executive agencies to engage with the scientific community.

I look forward to working on this issue together. If you have additional questions, please reach out to Claire Descamps (Claire_Descamps@gillibrand.senate.gov) and Sachin Mathur (Sachin_Mathur@gillibrand.senate.gov) with any additional questions.

Sincerely,

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

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator