

U.S. House of Representatives
Rep. Sharice L. Davids
Kansas Third District

March 18, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Rollins,

As you begin your service as Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), I write to urge you to continue prioritizing combatting Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). As the current outbreak continues to spread, Kansans are feeling the impacts at the grocery store. As of January 2025, the price of Grade A large eggs in US cities has risen to \$4.95, a significant increase from \$2.52 in January 2024¹. These prices are hurting consumers at a time when retail food prices have risen 23.6 percent from 2020 to 2024². We need to alleviate these rising costs and give families more breathing room in their grocery budgets.

Moreover, the current HPAI outbreak is also impacting dairy cows, with the virus being discovered for the first time in cattle in March 2024. This is the same clade of virus that has been impacting commercial poultry flocks³. Given this virus' demonstrated ability to infect cattle and the continued spread and potential for future mutations, HPAI poses a continued threat to the livestock industry and human health. For states like Kansas, where cattle and calves were a \$7.4 billion industry in 2023⁴, the future potential spread of HPAI and other animal diseases into beef cattle would pose a significant threat to the state economy.

To that end, I urge USDA to use all of the tools available to the Department to address HPAI. I was encouraged by USDA's February 2025 announcement of new investments in biosecurity, relief for farmers, and animal health research⁵. However, further investments and support of agriculture research are needed to comprehensively address HPAI, prevent further losses in the poultry sector, and lower egg prices for consumers.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/charts/consumer-price-index/consumer-price-index-average-price-data.htm>

² <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/ag-and-food-statistics-charting-the-essentials/food-prices-and-spending>

³ <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-health/avian-influenza/avian-influenza-virus-type-h5n1-us-dairy-cattle>

⁴ <https://www.agriculture.ks.gov/kansas-agriculture#:~:text=Who%20is%20Kansas%20Agriculture%3F,average%20size%20of%20804%20acres.d>

⁵ <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2025/02/26/usda-invests-1-billion-combat-avian-flu-and-reduce-egg-prices#:~:text=Press%20Release-,USDA%20Invests%20Up%20To%20%241%20Billion%20to,Flu%20and%20Reduce%20Egg%20Prices&text=Washing ton%2C%20D.C.%2C%20Feb.%2026,industry%2C%20and%20lower%20egg%20prices.>

As a Representative from Kansas, I know firsthand the value of agriculture research. The Kansas City area is the center of the Animal Health Corridor. According to the Kansas State Department of Commerce, this Corridor contains the world's largest concentration of animal health companies⁶. The companies and academic institutions in this region are on the cutting edge of animal health research that drives innovation in American agriculture and can strengthen our food supply chains.

However, agriculture research has been taken backwards, by steps the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and USDA have taken to reduce the federal workforce. These staffing cuts targeted workers at the Food Safety and Inspection Service who were working on responding to the HPAI outbreak. While a USDA spokesperson later released a statement that the agency was working to reverse these terminations⁷, there has been reporting of the termination of public health workers⁸ and employees at the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Kansas⁹. I am deeply concerned about the impact of this reckless approach on the federal employees working to promote human health and secure agriculture supply chains. I urge you to retain and rehire these public servants who are working to ensure the security and safety of our food supply chains.

This year, as of March 7, 2025, 30.3 million birds have been depopulated due to HPAI in commercial table egg layer flocks¹⁰. While this outbreak is a major driver of increased egg prices, it has also been reported that the Department of Justice has opened an investigation into the cause of high egg prices¹¹. I encourage you to continue to work in a cross-agency manner to bring a whole-of-government approach towards addressing these issues.

For the sake of American farmers and American consumers, I look forward to working with you to prioritize the response to the HPAI outbreak. This is critical to protecting our food supply and the farmers and consumers who rely on it.

Sincerely,



Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress

⁶ <https://www.kansascommerce.gov/industry/animal-health/>

⁷ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/doge/usda-accidentally-fired-officials-bird-flu-rehire-rcna192716>

⁸ <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/25/nx-s1-5307117/cdc-firings-infectious-disease-response>

⁹ https://themercury.com/news/source-at-least-28-nbaf-employees-fired-as-part-of-usdas-cuts/article_12087e38-ed5a-11ef-9771-87bba050d7f1.html

¹⁰ https://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/ams_3725.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.wsj.com/business/egg-prices-justice-department-probe-22d6a4f6>

CC: The Honorable Pamela Bondi, Attorney General