

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
COMMERCE
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

April 24, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I am writing to request the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) utmost attention on the ongoing outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in dairy cattle. This outbreak must be met with a robust and coordinated response from the federal government, including resources for farmers and ranchers, and public education sessions and materials detailing ongoing food safety precautions undertaken by dairy producers that keep Americans safe.

While I understand that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) confirms as of today that the domestic milk supply is safe, virus fragments have been found in pasteurized milk. I appreciate USDA's partnership with FDA and the ongoing efforts to identify and address the spread of the disease. It is imperative the agency quickly deploy additional resources in states that have the opportunity to prevent the disease from entering herds within their borders by working directly with farmers on improving their biosecurity options.

We must also ensure that the public is aware of the strong public health regulations administered by the FDA, including requiring pasteurization of any product labeled as "milk," which is intended to be sold in interstate commerce. Existing and ongoing research confirms that pasteurization is the best and most effective way to protect the food supply, and by improving public awareness, we may ensure that consumers have continued access to an important source of nutrition in dairy.

Finally, I would request that ongoing disease exposure trends and education materials be disseminated to state and local health departments. Frontline agricultural populations, in particular, must have access to this data in order to identify potential flu-like symptoms in their communities so that they may seek appropriate care and prevent further spread of HPAI. Moreover, I also request that USDA continue to maintain active coordination with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) should the need arise for dissemination of vaccines or antivirals into exposed populations.

As Senator of Wisconsin, America's Dairyland, I stand ready to work with you to ensure that our dairy farmers and producers have every tool at their disposal to weather this outbreak, and that consumers are armed with the knowledge of the ongoing public health efforts to protect them from HPAI.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and your ongoing dedication to supporting our nation's dairy farmers and producers and protecting American consumers and workers.

Sincerely,

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

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

cc: Dr. Robert Califf, Food and Drug Administration
Dr. Mandy Cohen, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Ms. Dawn O'Connell, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response