

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

February 13, 2025

Dear Secretary Rollins:

As co-chairs of the Congressional Chicken Caucus, we ask that you work to protect the vital economic interests in our poultry producing states and districts.

With the recent attention around increased egg prices due to highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), there have been renewed conversations about whether the U.S. should vaccinate our commercial poultry flocks against the virus. However, there should be a very clear distinction between all “poultry” to protect America’s family farmers and global trading relationships. To be clear, vaccination in any poultry sector – egg layers, turkeys, broilers, or ducks – will jeopardize the entire export market for all U.S. poultry products.

“Broilers,” or chickens raised for meat, are an entirely separate industry from the egg-laying sector, with distinct supply chains, geographic footprints, housing structure, bird lifespans, biosecurity practices, and trade portfolios.

Since the start of the current outbreak in 2022, of the more than 150 million birds affected, more than 77 percent have been commercial egg-laying hens, 12 percent commercial turkeys, and eight percent commercial broilers, according to USDA. The other impacted species have been ducks, backyard poultry, and game birds.

The problem is that most U.S. trading partners do not recognize countries that vaccinate as “free of HPAI” due to concerns that vaccines can mask the presence of the virus. Therefore, U.S. trading partners do not accept exports from countries that vaccinate, either for specific product categories, regions that vaccinate, or for all poultry from the country. In other words, if an egg-laying hen in Michigan is vaccinated for HPAI, it’s unclear to the rest of the U.S. poultry industry whether our trading partners would accept an unvaccinated broiler chicken from Mississippi.


America’s broiler producers export more than 15 percent of production valued at nearly \$5 billion annually, helping to meet the world’s protein needs. On average, every \$1 of U.S. agricultural products exported generates \$2.09 of domestic economic activity.¹

This is what is at stake in the HPAI vaccine discussion: a potential \$10+ billion annual loss to the U.S. economy and American broiler farmers feeling a huge brunt when they have been the least affected by HPAI. While some trading partners may levy temporary restrictions, others could be indefinite. A widescale HPAI vaccination program in the U.S., without first strengthening our animal health trade agreements, could cause our trading partners to take action that would significantly harm our domestic poultry sector.

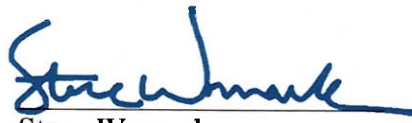
¹ <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/agricultural-trade-multipliers>

As the administration contemplates a HPAI strategy, we stand ready to be helpful partners to fully ensure America's chicken producers are protected.

Sincerely,


Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator


Christopher Coons
United States Senator


Steve Womack
Member of Congress


Jim Costa
Member of Congress

CC: Dr. Michael Watson, Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service
Dr. Rosemary Sifford, Deputy Administrator, Veterinary Services and Chief Veterinary Officer