



IDFA
International
Dairy Foods Association



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NATIONAL MILK
PRODUCERS FEDERATION



**United Egg
Producers**
d/b/a Egg Farmers of America

NATIONAL
Turkey
FEDERATION



August 16, 2024

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Re: Urgent development of H5Nx vaccines for dairy cows, turkeys and egg-laying hens

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The undersigned groups representing the U.S. dairy, turkey, and egg industries are writing today with an urgent request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its federal partners to support development of safe and effective H5Nx vaccinations for dairy cows, turkeys and egg-laying hens to help mitigate the circulation of H5Nx in dairy herds and reduce the risk of spill-over of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) into commercial turkey flocks and egg layer operations. As this outbreak of H5Nx continues to progress, it is clear that a new approach is needed. This includes the availability of animal vaccines effective against current and future strains of H5Nx that are necessary for a sustainable food supply as well as human and animal health. As USDA acts on our request, we stress that vaccines must be economically feasible for farmers and operators and cannot be deployed without a comprehensive science-based approach that includes a distribution strategy; concurrent comprehensive risk assessments; and a validated, risk-based surveillance strategy that has been agreed upon by our international trading partners.

Together, our industries produce healthy, nutritious, and safe turkey, egg and dairy food products. These products contribute to our nation's domestic food security, drive economic growth for thousands of communities across the country, and support good-paying jobs for millions of people. That is why the ongoing outbreak of H5Nx in poultry and dairy operations is so concerning—not only does it threaten the livelihoods of farmers and producers, but also the stability of our local economies and the security of our broader food supply. Efforts to manage H5Nx on farms can also have direct impacts on food prices for consumers, threatening to increase costs across the supply chain from farm to table. Furthermore, a widespread and circulating animal disease with no end in sight could eventually upend the balance of the overall farm economy, putting billions of dollars of bulk commodities, inputs, and consumer products at risk.



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A continuing outbreak also endangers our workforce. In July, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed a tenth human case of H5Nx virus infection in the United States among individuals working closely with infected dairy cattle or poultry. Fortunately, these individuals reportedly suffered mild symptoms and recovered. However, we see no evidence or actions by the federal government to suggest that H5N1 animal-to-person transmission will cease.

Therefore, we are writing today to request that USDA and its federal partners bring a new sense of urgency and preparedness to the ongoing response by supporting the development of effective H5Nx vaccinations for dairy cows, turkeys and egg-laying hens that can be deployed to ensure this virus does not continue to negatively impact U.S. public and animal health. This includes completing ongoing work led by the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to evaluate or develop a vaccine that is effective in addressing H5Nx in commercial poultry, moving expeditiously to produce a bovine H5Nx vaccine, and conducting concurrent comprehensive risk assessments for each. Further, it is imperative that a science-based surveillance strategy be developed in which infected animals can be distinguished from vaccinated animals.

Before an economically feasible vaccine can be deployed for use by farmers and operators, there are serious policy questions to answer related to domestic and international markets. Therefore, USDA must remain dedicated to engaging with our international trading partners to ensure our trade policies reflect the new realities of a world that is constantly combating H5Nx. We have confidence that USDA and its federal partners—in consultation with leaders from our industries—can create a policy environment that is conducive to the continued free flow of U.S. dairy, turkey, and egg product exports once H5Nx vaccines are available for deployment, but these international conversations must be accelerated.

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Together, our industries strongly support efforts by federal and state agencies to protect public health. We are working in partnership with the public and private sectors to bring information and resources to our members to better secure the health of our workers, animals and operations across our supply chains as this outbreak continues. Yet if this virus continues to circulate among dairy herds, turkey and egg layer operations, wild mammals, wild birds, and people working closely with birds and dairy cows, H5N1 will remain a significant and imposing threat to our nation's food security and, therefore, our national security.

We welcome the opportunity to brief you and members of your staff on the potential animal and human health outcomes as well as the damaging economic and market impacts that this virus could inflict without the U.S. government's urgent intervention to expedite the development of safe, effective H5Nx vaccines that can be deployed to



further protect U.S. dairy herds and turkey and egg layer operations without disruptions to trade. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter and please ask your staff to reach out to suggest a time to meet. We appreciate the ongoing dialogue between our sectors and USDA and we look forward to continuing that collaboration. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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