

Animal Groups Warn Brooke Rollins: USDA Driving Inflation, Animal Suffering, and Risking Health with Bird Flu Response

Agency response is gutting a key sector of agriculture, costing consumers more than \$20 billion and doing little to stem spread of runaway bird flu H5N1

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, February 3, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ --

In a letter sent today to Agriculture Secretary nominee Brooke Rollins, agricultural veterinarians and an executive from the Center for a Humane Economy and Animal Wellness Action charged that the USDA

has dangerously bungled the response to the H5N1 epidemic, with actions that have “caused egg prices to soar, disrupted the present-day and future work of a broad set of commercial bird producers, and done little to arrest the spread of H5N1.”



A dying chicken among flock suffocated by foam

“

The bottom line is, the USDA has been thoroughly ineffective in stemming the spread of H5N1, which has been found in 458 species and in all 50 states and does not appear to be slowing.”

Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action

The letter is [viewable here](#).

The organizations and its veterinarians have learned from its investigations that the USDA has failed to pursue a poultry vaccination strategy — adopted already by Mexico and France — because of its wrong-headed deference to some voices within the American broiler bird (meat) industry who don’t want to see interruptions in its \$7.4 billion export market for dark chicken meat. The egg, turkey, and dairy industries appear to favor vaccination to limit the spread of H5N1 and to obviate mass killings of animals.

“The USDA’s foolish obedience to the single-minded wishes of a few actors in the broiler bird industry is gutting other sectors of avian agriculture, passing on tens of billions in costs to

consumers, and resulting in mass depopulation of animals by startlingly inhumane means,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy. “The bottom line is, the USDA has been thoroughly ineffective in stemming the spread of H5N1, which has been found in 458 species and in all 50 states and does not appear to be slowing.”

The organizations also charged that the USDA is treating H5N1 as a “foreign animal disease” even though it has been found in hundreds of species and is now endemic. Since the U.S. bird flu H5N1 outbreak began three years ago, in February 2022, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) of the USDA has depopulated (euthanized) [148.25 million bird flu virus-exposed or infected poultry](#) on 690 commercial farms and 792 backyard flocks. Flocks in all 50 states and Puerto Rico have been infected. While “stamping out” may have controlled past bird flu outbreaks, the evidence is overwhelming that APHIS must find another path out of this ongoing and ever-expanding epidemic.

“We cannot kill our way out of this crisis, because the disease is, in practical terms, everywhere,” said Colonel Tom Pool (ret.), DVM, MPH, senior veterinarian with Animal Wellness Action and the former chief of the U.S. Army Veterinary Command. “Mass killing is just compounding our problems by depopulating millions of animals at the heart of American agriculture and driving up food prices for consumers to the tune of billions of dollars.”

“It would be very easy to negotiate terms with other countries to accept dark meat from vaccinated birds, since vaccination is a core part of animal health for nearly all major sectors of animal agriculture,” said Jim Keen, DVM, PhD, director of veterinary science for the Center for a Humane Economy and a former senior research scientist at USDA. “In fact, the U.S. last month agreed to accept duck meat products from France derived from H5N1-vaccinated birds, deeming these products safe.”

“We have an H5N1 epidemic that’s been running rampant for nearly three years, with no end in sight, and the USDA is treating H5N1 like a foreign disease that it can stamp out,” added Dr. Kean, who served as a scientist at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Neb. “The agency has it wrong on the basics.”

Dr. Keen specializes in emerging and zoonotic infectious diseases of farmed animals. He has broad field experience in outbreak investigation and animal disease control including enteric zoonotic bacteria from livestock in the United States, Foot and Mouth Disease in the United Kingdom, and African Swine Fever in the Caucasus, and virulent Newcastle Disease in the United States.

The organizations also criticized the USDA for failing to disclose information about the 796 “backyard flocks” it has depopulated, underreporting the role that cockfighting may be playing in disease spread. The USDA has previously acknowledged that there may be 20 million fighting birds raised in the United States for illegal domestic fights and for fights overseas, with these birds moved across the world in underground commerce.

“With the virus thriving on animal-to-animal transmission pathways, and with cockfighting playing such a documented role in past spread of avian diseases — including bird flu and virulent Newcastle Disease — it is foolish for the USDA to ignore the 20 million fighting birds being trafficked across the United States and imported and exported,” Dr. Pool said. “The USDA is conducting mass killing of laying hens, but what about a stamp-out strategy for the fighting of birds, including enforcing our laws to halt dangerous commerce in these animals?”

[Cockfighting activity is a known and substantial risk factor](#) for bird flu H5N1 introduction, global spread, and human zoonotic infections. Cockfighting birds were responsible for two-thirds of all U.S. outbreaks of virulent Newcastle disease, a dangerous viral poultry disease very similar to bird flu.

Colonel Pool was commander of the U.S. Army Veterinary Command before serving as Territorial Veterinarian for the U.S. Territory of Guam. While serving the Department of Agriculture in Guam, he noted that nearly 12,000 fighting birds were shipped to Guam in a five-year period in violation of federal law. He has authored peer-reviewed publications on leptospirosis and dengue hemorrhagic fever.

“While there’s little we can do to stop wild birds from shedding the virus to hosts along the migratory flyways, there is something we can do about widespread transmission of the virus by cockfighters,” Dr. Keen said. “We can shut down their operations and arrest the people involved, thereby reducing risks to our commercial flocks and other keepers of poultry.”

The organizations also called on Congress to pass the FIGHT Act, which has immense support from law enforcement, the egg industry, the gaming industry, and animal welfare and conservation organizations.

The organization detailed three broad areas for action by USDA to contain bird flu, with vaccination at the heart of a new approach.

Prevention: Immediately institute strategic bird flu vaccination of high-risk commercial flocks and advocate for a crackdown on rampant cockfighting.

Reporting and transparency: The USDA must be more transparent about disease discovery and disclose the types of flocks that are harboring disease.

De-emphasis of depopulation strategies: The USDA must stop ventilation shutdown as a killing strategy, except in extreme cases, as a matter of food security and humane treatment.

Wayne Pacelle

Animal Wellness Action

+1 443-865-3600

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

Facebook
LinkedIn
Instagram

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/782856002>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2025 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.