

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

April 10, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Since January 2015, H5 viruses have affected backyard and commercial poultry production in at least 10 states and resulted in the loss of nearly 900,000 turkeys in Minnesota alone. I am writing to urge you to take action to ensure that continued indemnity payments for producers suffering from the devastating effects of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

The outbreak and spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza are having severe economic consequences throughout the industry. In Minnesota, an estimated 450 family farms that raise turkeys are at risk. If this problem persists and current indemnity funding sources are exhausted, I urge you to use your emergency authority to make available the funds required to get through this outbreak and prevent Minnesota turkey farmers – many of whom are 3rd, 4th, and even 5th generation farmers – from losing their livelihood.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the risk from highly pathogenic avian influenza infections to men and women who work throughout the industry is low. I commend the collaborative effort – led by the U.S. Department of Agriculture – that has taken the necessary precautions to safeguard human health from even the smallest risk and ensure that our food system is safe.

In order to limit the economic impact of this disease and ensure that the risk to human health is minimal, it is imperative that the funding required to carry out this collaborative avian influenza response be maintained.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to continue working with you to both end the current outbreak and also prevent future introductions of highly pathogenic avian influenza into the United States.

Sincerely,



Al Franken
United States Senator