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INDIAN AFFAIRS  
BUDGET

May 2, 2024

The Honorable Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary of Health and Human Services  
United States Department of Health and  
Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Becerra:

Thank you for continuing to work together to respond to the current outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza. Together, your work continues to protect the health of the American people, the sustainability of our agricultural markets, and the safety of our food supply.

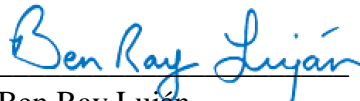
H5N1 avian influenza remains a persistent threat to animal and human health. While avian influenza is endemic among birds globally, the recent outbreak in U.S. dairy cattle and one human case is concerning. Congress is tracking bovine H5N1 outbreaks in nine states, including eight impacted farms in New Mexico. Thanks in large part to the urgency of the U.S. Government's response, the current risk to human health is low. However, it is incumbent on the U.S. Government to act aggressively to stem the likelihood of future pandemics. Our country's dairy and cattle producers are critical to this plan, but they should not bear the burden alone.

As you are likely aware, the current H5N1 outbreak in cattle poses a particular challenge to small producers who manage diverse livestock operations. It is imperative that these producers possess the financial means to effectively quarantine affected livestock and undertake a thorough cleaning and disinfection process. These steps are crucial to halt viral spread to other animals, such as swine, and ultimately safeguard human health, but they are not without cost and risk. To that end, I urge USDA to make available incentives for dairy cattle producers to enhance their readiness and capabilities in mitigating the spread of viruses with pandemic potential, similar to the approach USDA takes with poultry producers.

Specifically, I urge that USDA expand the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Producer Indemnity and Compensation program, which is focused on eradicating and controlling foreign animal diseases, emerging diseases, and program diseases, to include dairy cattle and other mammals affected by avian influenza. This expansion is vital for providing our farmers and ranchers with the certainty and resources needed to eradicate the virus effectively and maintain the integrity of our food supply and public health.

Thank you once again for your dedication to protecting human and animal health, as well as ensuring the safety and security of our food supply. By extending the APHIS program to include dairy cattle and other impacted mammals, the U.S will significantly enhance our capacity to prevent the spread of this virus and further protect the health of Americans.

Sincerely,



Ben Ray Lujan  
Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator