

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 21, 2025

The Honorable Stephen Vaden
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Deputy Secretary Vaden,

We write to express our strong concerns that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Department-wide reorganization plan could disrupt critical animal and plant health activities. The USDA should not hamper its capacity to address the dangerous threats posed by New World Screwworm (NWS) and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) to livestock and poultry, like many other animal health challenges faced by the United States, through coordination, monitoring, communication, and research and scientific development. Instead, USDA appears to be pushing forward with an unformed plan on an unclear timeline that will result in the loss of the workers best positioned to protect against those threats, like its most experienced animal disease researchers, veterinarians, and epidemiologists.

USDA is already reeling from the chaotic firing, rehiring, and resignation of key workers. Since the beginning of this Administration alone, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has seen over 1,300 employees leave due to the Deferred Resignation Program, including around 100 veterinarian positions, with more than 500 additional employees departing due to other attrition. Most of these employees were in key animal and plant health positions working within the divisions of Veterinary Services, Plant Protection & Quarantine, and Wildlife Services, preventing dangerous plant and animal disease threats from entering the United States and providing critical deterrent services to airports to avert bird strikes on planes. Despite the recent August 15 announcement about a plan to address NWS, USDA is doing little to fill the holes in its staff: compared to fifty-two listings for Veterinary Medical Officers in 2024, USDA has only posted two listings for Veterinary Medical Officers in 2025, even with the significant losses that these roles have sustained due to the Deferred Resignation Program.

The recent human case of NWS highlights further problems with USDA's reorganization plan. After the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) learned of the infection on August 4, USDA failed to meet the moment by communicating to stakeholders and the public about the issue in a timely and complete way. Instead, USDA caused confusion and concern by trickling out information over the course of the ensuing weeks. We strongly believe that USDA should not move forward with a reorganization plan that will cause even further disruptions that could harm not only the health of livestock and crops, leading to higher grocery prices and losses to farmers and ranchers, but also the health of the American public. This includes disrupting the ongoing work of the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, the largest Agricultural Research Service facility in the

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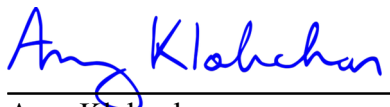
country and the very site that helped to develop and promote innovations to combat NWS. The USDA is supposed to be the front line of defense for producers across the United States, protecting against these threats, whether it be NWS, avian flu, African Swine Fever, or invasive fruit flies.

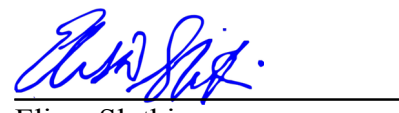
Please answer the following questions, as they relate to USDA's animal health response duties:

- 1) With so many workers planning to be relocated from the National Capital Region, how will you preserve coordination with agencies like the CDC that are crucial to frontline animal health work?
- 2) Given the significant loss of expert staff at ARS and APHIS and the unknown number of ARS and APHIS staff subject to relocation, what steps are you taking as a part of this reorganization plan to ensure that:
 - a. Animal health monitoring work is not disrupted, and animal and plant health warning signs are not missed;
 - b. Lines of communication are maintained, and timely notifications are provided to all relevant stakeholders in the animal and plant health community; and
 - c. Research and development are continued apace to address emerging animal and plant health threats?
- 3) Given the specialized expertise required for many animal health jobs at USDA that may be uprooted due to this reorganization, what are you doing to ensure that you are both filling the needed jobs and not hiring key workers away from state or local agencies, causing further holes in the animal health safety net?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator


Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator


Mark R. Warner
United States Senator


Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510



Angela D. Alsobrooks
United States Senator



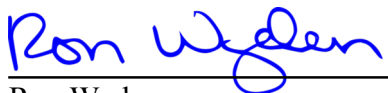
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



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United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator