



United Egg Producers

Leadership by Egg Farmers for Egg Farmers

August 28, 2024

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Dear Chairs Stabenow and Thompson and Vice Chairs Boozman and Scott,

I am president and CEO of the United Egg Producers, the nation's dominant voice for America's egg farmers. I want to join so many of our key producers around the nation and urge you to move the FIGHT FIGHT Act this year as a stand-alone measure given the urgency of the H5N1 outbreak threatening bird health and the volume of our egg supply.

The farmers who are part of our association produce more than 90 percent of the 9.2 billion eggs that move into the food supply and provide a low-cost, high-protein staple of the American diet. I write to ask that your boss help us protect our flocks from disease and lend *active* support for H.R. 2742, Rep. Don Bacon's Fighting Inhumane Gambling and High-Risk Trafficking Act. This legislation has the support of key players in agriculture, law enforcement, gaming companies, and animal welfare and conservation groups.

Gamefowl are high-risk disease vectors and reservoirs because they are widely sold and traded, deliberately mixed under stressful conditions at fighting derbies, reared under poor biosecurity, and employ husbandry or fighting practices that spread disease. Cockfighting drives outbreaks of serious poultry and zoonotic diseases especially virulent Newcastle disease (vND) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI, "bird flu") viruses. HPAI and vND spread widely and quickly and can kill virtually every wild bird species and all poultry. Neither virus is normally present in our homeland. When outbreaks occur, these viruses are controlled by lethal depopulation, sometimes resulting in the killing of millions of birds, and our flocks are particularly at risk because of our housing systems and stocking densities.

- Ten of the 15 US vND outbreaks originated from illegally smuggled game fowl for cockfighting causing major disease epidemics in southern California in 2002-03 and 2018-20. At least 16 million birds died and more than \$1 billion was spent to control U.S.-centered vND outbreaks.
- In the 2014-2015 U.S. HPAI H5 epidemic, 50.4 million commercial layers, and turkeys died or were euthanized in 21 states causing economic losses of \$3.3 billion.
- As of August 18, 2023, the ongoing U.S. Dec 2021-present bird flu epidemic has killed 58.79 million poultry in 325 commercial flocks and 514 backyard flocks, and countless wildfowl in all states except Hawaii. This will be the most expensive animal disease outbreak in U.S. history, costing billions of dollars to (so far unsuccessfully) extirpate the virus while inflating consumer prices for eggs and poultry.
- HPAI is worse than vND because [the bird flu virus easily mutates and can infect and kill people](#). A bird flu outbreak launched or sustained by cockfighting could lead to a zoonotic avian influenza plague more harmful than the COVID-19 pandemic.



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Our producers have invested billions in infrastructure in communities throughout the nation. Their daily commercial work is compromised when avian disease outbreaks occur and the government orders our flocks depopulated. One of our major producers in Michigan lost millions in his flock in that state, creating major supply-chain issues for so many of that company's customers. We work hard to prevent outbreaks through good biosecurity practices and policies, and an enhance national anti-cockfighting policy is important to our industry.

We take pride in producing the least expensive form of protein that benefits all Americans. We don't need government financial support to build our capacity or to run our flocks, but we do want the government's help to protect us from a known viral threat in the homeland that is not of our making. We, of course, also regard the mistreatment of the animals in cockfighting as antithetical to our careful observance of animal care and safety standards.

I look forward to hearing you and again hope you will join this measure as cosponsors and move the legislation through your respective chambers.

Thank you,

Chad Gregory
President/CEO