

October 22, 2026

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
and Forestry
328-A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Glenn “G.T.” Thompson
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Angie Craig
Ranking Member
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Craig:

As veterinarians who now work to advance mainstream public policy related to animals, we write to reiterate concerns we raised in an April 3 [letter](#)¹ about Section 3201(d) of H.R. 7567, the *Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026*, and to raise those same concerns about Section 3205(b) of S. 5526, the *Agricultural Act of 2026*. These twin provisions would repeal a 30-year-old taxpayer protection that bars the U.S. Mink Export Development Council and other mink industry trade associations from receiving federal dollars for trade promotion from USDA’s Market Access Program. Since we first wrote to you in April, the U.S. has suffered its first confirmed outbreak of H5N1 on a mink farm, underscoring the urgency to protect public health by striking these provisions from the Farm Bill before any vote on final passage.

This August, a mink farm in Utah became the epicenter of a major H5N1 outbreak.² Although this virus has appeared in recent years on fur farms in Finland³ and Spain,⁴ the Utah cases were the first identified outbreak among farmed mink in the U.S., raising serious concerns about animal health, zoonotic disease transmission, and pandemic preparedness.

¹ Drs. Jim Keen and Tom Pool letter to House and Senate Agriculture Committee leaders, 3 April 2026: <https://animalwellnessaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Mink-Farming-Repeal-of-Taxpayers-Payment-for-Foreign-Fashion-Shows-Section-3201d.pdf>

² “‘Watch them die’: Bird flu is ravaging a Utah mink farm, killing 80% of the herd. State agriculture officials have no clear plan,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 27 Sept. 2026: <https://www.sltrib.com/news/2026/09/27/animal-advocates-raise-alarm-over/>

³ “All minks to be culled at bird flu sites, at least 50K fur animals already ordered killed,” *Yle News*, 8 Jan. 2023: <https://yle.fi/a/74-20043331>

⁴ “‘Incredibly concerning’: Bird flu outbreak at Spanish mink farm triggers pandemic fears,” *Science*, 24 Jan. 2023: <https://www.science.org/content/article/incredibly-concerning-bird-flu-outbreak-spanish-mink-farm-triggers-pandemic-fears>

The disease caused by H5N1 is commonly known as avian influenza or “bird flu,” but this is partly a misnomer, as it can also infect mammals, including humans. **Farmed mink are highly susceptible to respiratory viruses, which they can mutate, amplify, and transmit to humans.** H5N1 has a documented pandemic potential,⁵ and disturbingly, the situation in Utah came to public attention not through USDA, state agriculture or health officials, or the CDC, but only after independent disease watchers found seven identified cases in USDA’s mammalian H5N1 database. Mink sampled on August 7 tested positive on August 17, and the outbreak spread extensively through the farm, with the producer anticipating mortality approaching 80% of the captive population. Despite the severity of the situation, Utah authorities did not quarantine the premises, and federal and state agencies provided little public information.

Unlike similar recent cases in Europe that prompted aggressive disease control and investigation, the Utah outbreak was characterized by limited transparency and an apparently inadequate public health response. Newly released government records revealed that officials focused heavily on financial assistance and emergency vaccination while critical questions remained unanswered about the source of infection, worker exposure, mink-to-mink transmission, and viral mutations associated with mammalian adaptation. Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy have called for a comprehensive epidemiologic investigation, release of viral genomic data, and full disclosure of worker health findings to assess the outbreak’s potential threat to human and animal health.

Globally, scientific and policy analyses increasingly describe mink farming as a “biohazard” due to several factors: 1) high-density confinement of genetically similar animals; 2) frequent human-animal interactions; 3) naturally high susceptibility of minks to various pathogens; and 4) the stressful, immuno-suppressive animal rearing conditions of most farms. Escaped farmed mink can also infect wild populations and contaminate native ecosystems, creating disease reservoirs that are virtually impossible to eradicate.

In 2021, Israel became the first country to ban the sale of fur. In 2023, California began implementing a state law prohibiting the sale of new fur products. In at least five U.S. states, similar bans have been passed by local governments, including in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Ann Arbor, and Boulder.⁶ In Europe, 23 countries have either stopped production or initiated a phaseout of mink farming, including the second largest fur-farming nation on Earth (Poland). Canada’s province of British Columbia⁷ also enacted a permanent ban on mink farming due to public health concerns. Bipartisan legislation, H.R. 6513, the *Minks In Narrowly Kept Spaces (MINKS) are Superspreaders Act*, has been introduced to align U.S. policy with that of these other First World nations, but to date it has received no legislative hearing or markup.

Against this backdrop, the current House and Senate Farm Bills each contain provisions to reopen federal taxpayer support for mink farming, which would likely incentivize more of this high-risk activity. If Congress rushes to reverse course on mink policy without considering the consequences, it is not

⁵ Peacock TP, Barclay WS. Mink farming poses risks for future viral pandemics. *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A*. 2023 Jul 25;120(30):e2303408120. doi: 10.1073/pnas.2303408120. Epub 2023 Jul 19. PMID: 37467264; PMCID: PMC10372571.

⁶ Fur Free Alliance, “Fur Bans,” <https://www.furfreealliance.com/fur-bans/>

⁷ “Marking the end of mink farming in British Columbia,” *The Fur-Bearers*, 22 March 2023: <https://thefurbearers.com/blog/marking-the-end-of-mink-farming-in-british-columbia/>

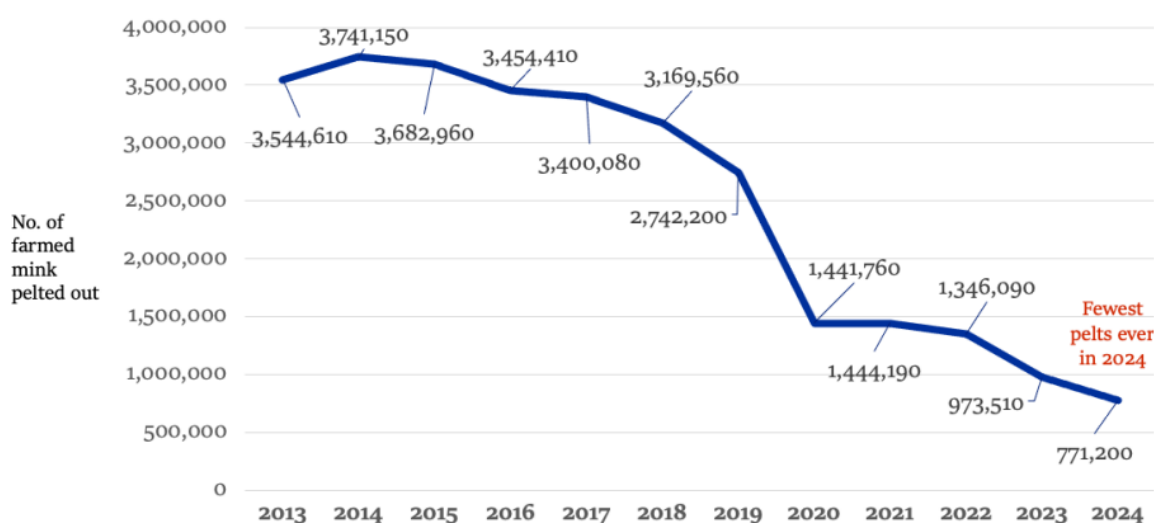
implausible that the epicenter of the next pandemic could be a mink farm in America's heartland rather than an urban setting like Wuhan, China.

The current federal funding restriction was enacted a generation ago on a bipartisan basis by the 104th Congress under Speaker Newt Gingrich and signed by President Clinton. Since then, it has saved taxpayers millions of dollars each year in de facto subsidies to advertise luxury fashion products to high-end foreign consumers, primarily in China. Abruptly reinstating those subsidies after 30 years would have far-reaching consequences, yet there has been no opportunity for lawmakers to debate the issue or learn more, as there has been **no standalone bill** filed in either chamber and **no public hearing** on the issue in any committee or subcommittee. The policy was not mentioned once in either the House or the Senate markup, yet it was quietly included in both chambers' committee-reported Farm Bills—without any attempt at regular order.

Whoever may be driving it, the behind-the-scenes effort to resurrect this subsidy is bewildering because just four years ago, the full House of Representatives adopted a bipartisan amendment to the *America COMPETES Act* to ban the mink trade outright.⁸ In that very recent historical context, the rush to resume taxpayer support for the industry after 30 years is not just a step in the wrong direction; it is a head-spinning U-turn. Such a drastic policy reversal would economically benefit our primary geopolitical rival while creating an avoidable public health risk for 340 million Americans.

Apart from the clear biosecurity concerns raised by the proposed policy reversal, mink farming is simply a bad investment for the American taxpayer. Due to changing consumer preferences over the past half-century, U.S. demand for mink fur products has collapsed. In 2024, domestic fur farms produced just over 770,000 mink pelts, down from more than 3.7 million a decade earlier (see graph below). That was the lowest number of pelts produced in this country since the USDA began keeping records.

Number of U.S. farmed mink pelts produced 2013-2024



Source: USDA Library/cornell.edu

⁸ Center for a Humane Economy press release, “U.S. House Passes Sweeping Ban on Mink Farming Citing Cruelty and Contagion Risks,” 11 Jan. 2022: <https://centerforahumaneconomy.org/us-house-passes-sweeping-ban-on-mink-farming-citing-cruelty-contagion-risks/>

According to USDA data, as of 2022, only 110 U.S. mink farms remained in operation.⁹ That number was down from nearly 500 when the federal funding restriction was enacted in the 1990s, and from more than 7,000 at the industry's peak in 1960.

As these data show, mink production is not a strategic agricultural sector tied to domestic food supply, employment, or global competitiveness. It is a small, declining industry built to service our principal geopolitical rival. Our limited federal dollars should not be squandered on this niche luxury sector when there are so many other parts of the agricultural economy that support U.S. food security, rural employment, and strategic trade priorities.

Before passing legislation to boost production of a commodity that Americans no longer want to buy, Congress should hold hearings to hear from experts about the risks this industry poses to public health. America's taxpayers should not be asked to bankroll a biohazard. We therefore urge you to remove Section 3201(d) of H.R. 7567 and Section 3205(b) of S. 5526 before any vote on final passage of a Farm Bill this year.

For a deeper discussion of this issue, please see our [scientific report](#)¹⁰ and [fact sheet](#)¹¹ on the link between mink farming and zoonotic disease risks.

Sincerely,

/s/

Jim Keen, DVM, Ph.D.
Director of Veterinary Science
Center for a Humane Economy

/s/

Colonel Tom Pool, U.S. Army (Ret.), DVM, MPH
Senior Veterinarian
Animal Wellness Action

cc: The Honorable John Thune, U.S. Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Chuck Schumer, U.S. Senate Minority Leader
The Honorable Mike Johnson, Speaker of the House of Representatives
The Honorable Steve Scalise, U.S. House Majority Leader
The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries, U.S. House Minority Leader
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Member of Congress
The Honorable Vern Buchanan, Member of Congress

⁹ USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service, <https://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/results/D966A425-53CC-3072-BA48-2A3C901447AA>

¹⁰ Drs. Jim Keen and Tom Pool, "Mink Farming and SARS-CoV-2: An Examination of the Science and Scale of Problems Associated with Mink Farms: SARS-CoV-2 Spillover to Humans and Wildlife, Emerging New Variants, and Animal Welfare Problems For Mink on Intensive Farms," January 2022: <https://centerforahumaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Mink-Farming-SARS-CoV-2-by-Jim-Keen-DVM-PhD.pdf>

¹¹ Animal Wellness Action's mink farming fact sheet: https://animalwellnessaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Mink-Farming-Fact-Sheet_11-26-25.pdf