



May 23, 2025

Mr. Paul MacKinnon
President, Canadian Food Inspection Agency
1400 Merivale Road
Ottawa, ON, K1A 0Y9, Canada

Re: H5N1 Infected Ostriches at Universal Ostrich Farm in Edgewood, B.C.

Dear President MacKinnon:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us yesterday in connection with the approximately 400 ostriches at Universal Ostrich Farm in Edgewood, B.C. We are very grateful for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency's (CFIA) willingness to consider the proposal we discussed, which is further outlined in this letter. We value our partnership with CFIA and look forward to continued collaboration on this matter and others.

We are respectfully requesting CFIA to consider not culling the entire flock of ostriches at Universal Ostrich Farm. Given that a proportion of these ostriches were infected with avian influenza (H5N1) last year, we believe there is significant value in studying this population, for several reasons:

- (1) The flock is a controlled environment that enables longitudinal studies of the natural history status post H5N1 infection. Ostriches can live up to 50 years, providing the opportunity for future insights into immune longevity associated with H5N1 virus.
- (2) The potential to study both antibody levels and cellular immunity to help further our scientific understanding of the virus and the immune physiologic response.
- (3) The opportunity to study the important principle of antibody-dependent enhancement and possible therapeutics in the setting of prior infection.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), would like to offer our full support and assistance in conducting diagnostic testing and undertaking a long-term body of research on these ostriches, contingent on CFIA's approval and that of the farm owners. The United States government has been tracking H5N1 and studying it very intensely to prepare for a potential epidemic, including working on vaccines and studying the interaction between the virus and the immune system. We believe significant scientific knowledge may be garnered from following the ostriches in a controlled environment at the Universal Ostrich Farm.

While we understand the importance of preventing the spread of H5N1, we believe the decision to cull the entire flock of approximately 400 ostriches—made nearly six months after the initial positive test results—will not influence the current health status of the surviving birds. Further, because avian influenza has been around for thousands of years and is endemic in wild bird populations in the United States and Canada, efforts to extirpate it by culling birds will be fruitless.

unless we are willing to exterminate every wild bird in North America. we propose that our governments work together to devise more nuanced and thoughtful protocols—based upon the emerging scientific evidence—for controlling outbreaks in domestic flocks.

Culling infected flocks should be a judicious decision, one that considers both scientific evidence and the long-term impact on both animal welfare and agricultural sustainability. The indiscriminate destruction of entire flocks without up-to-date testing and evaluation can have significant consequences, including the loss of valuable genetic stock that may help explain risk factors for H5N1 mortality. This may be important for future agricultural resilience.

With respect to the specific ostriches at Universal Ostrich Farm, given that only a fraction of these ostriches died, and no symptoms have been reported in the remaining birds for several months, we believe this situation requires further careful evaluation. It is well-documented that avian influenza does not persist in birds indefinitely, and many avian species recover from mild cases without transmission. In fact, avian influenza typically has an incubation period of just 3-7 days and is most transmissible during the acute phase of infection. The fact that the remaining ostriches have been asymptomatic for months suggests they may have already overcome the infection with downstream immunity, making the culling of all healthy birds a potentially disproportionate measure. Additionally, culling these unique animals can disrupt the livelihood of farmers, especially in cases where surviving animals present no further risk.

As outlined in this letter, we respectfully request CFIA to partner with us on this important issue. Avian influenza is a shared threat that we jointly face. We are fully committed to supporting CFIA and Canadian farmers in safeguarding both public health and animal welfare and to further studying this important and unique flock for scientific advancement. We look forward to collaborating with CFIA on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

Secretary, United States Department of Health and Human Services



Jay Bhattacharya, MD, PhD

Director, the National Institutes of Health



Martin A. Makary, MD, MPH

Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration