



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

July 15, 2025

The Honorable Heath MacDonald
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
Government of Canada
Ottawa, ON K1A 0C5
Canada

Dear Minister MacDonald:

We are writing to urge the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to delay any planned culling of the scientifically significant ostrich flock (henceforth, “the flock”) at Universal Ostrich Farm, British Columbia, and instead pursue collaborative research to study these unique animals.

As of July 14, 2025, the remaining birds in the flock will have survived more than 170 days¹ after H5N1 infection without symptoms or further documented transmission since the initial detection of H5N1 in December 2024. This exceeds the documented incubation and shedding periods for avian influenza by a wide margin.² This is a unique research opportunity.

We propose immediate collaboration between CFIA, Canadian researchers, and our U.S.-based scientists from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We are prepared to offer direct access to advanced diagnostic, immunologic, and therapeutic research infrastructure to rapidly capitalize on this scientific opportunity. Such international cooperation has precedent: during the COVID-19 pandemic, CFIA worked closely with the NIH, the Food and Drug Administration, and other global scientific institutions, and demonstrated Canada’s capacity for global scientific partnership and public health responsiveness.

The current H5N1 challenge will likely not reach this level of crisis, but visionary leadership should strive to minimize this possibility and build useful knowledge for future avian influenza outbreaks. Animals that are resistant to viral infections, or recovered from them, have been essential for later in-human therapeutics, and have informed our scientific understanding of influenza,³ HIV,⁴ and hepatitis⁵ viruses. Close study of the flock’s long-term survival may

¹ https://decisions.fct-cf.gc.ca/sc-cf/decisions/en/item/528164/index.do#_Toc198034604

² https://www.merckvetmanual.com/poultry/avian-influenza-in-poultry-and-wild-birds/avian-influenza-in-poultry-and-wild-birds#Epidemiology_v3343929

³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4448699/>

⁴ <https://www.nature.com/articles/laban.1279>

⁵ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4448699/>

similarly aid future developments of treatments and/or vaccines for H5N1 and other avian influenzas.

If Canada prefers not to host continued research, the Department would appreciate the opportunity to engage with the CFIA to discuss options to perform this research in the United States.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.

Cc:

Dr. Mehmet Oz, Administrator, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Dr. Marty Makary, Commissioner, Food & Drug Administration

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, Director, National Institutes of Health