

## Castle Sends Letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture with Recommendations from Delmarva Industry Experts as National Strategy is Released -- April 24, 2006

Wilmington, DE -- In advance of the release of the Draft National Avian Influenza (AI) Response Plan put together by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Delaware congressman Mike Castle last week sent a letter to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Mike Johanns, encouraging his department to meet with Delmarva Peninsula experts before finalizing the Response Plan. Based on "best practice" recommendations gathered at an Avian Influenza Summit in Georgetown, Delaware last week, Castle feels that the practices on the Delmarva Peninsula should be used to strengthen the Response Plan.

The recommendations from the participants in the Summit called for improved surveillance, rapid response, technology and equipment. The recommendations also emphasized the need for a federal response plan that includes a comprehensive roadmap for states with less-experienced in dealing with AI, focusing on greater transparency and public outreach about AI.

In his letter, Castle urged Secretary Johanns to convene a meeting with local experts from the Delmarva Peninsula and other key regions with expertise on the subjects of animal health and Avian Influenza prevention and containment.

"While I support Secretary Johanns' efforts to improve preparedness for AI at the agricultural level, I am concerned that the Draft National AI Response Plan does not include groundbreaking new technology and tactics, which are currently being utilized on the Delmarva Peninsula. Before we commit to spending billions on an avian influenza strategy, it is crucial that federal officials are well versed in proven advancements in this field. The National AI Response Plan will serve as a roadmap for many states less experienced than Delmarva in preparing for avian influenza, and thus it is critical that such a plan contain comprehensive and up-to-the minute best practices. The expertise on Delmarva should be tapped," Castle said in his letter.

Full text of the letter is copied below.

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April 19, 2006

The Honorable Mike Johanns

Secretary

U.S. Department of Agriculture

1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.

Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Johanns:

As the United States Department of Agriculture works with other U.S. agencies on the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, I am writing to urge you to closely consider key biosecurity measures that have been developed, tested, and adopted on the Delmarva Peninsula. Specifically, I would like to request that you convene a meeting with local experts from the Delmarva Peninsula and other key regions with expertise on the frontlines of animal health and avian influenza prevention and containment.

Avian influenza is a dangerous virus with the potential to kill hundreds of thousands of people across the globe and I commend the work our federal government has done to date to ensure the U.S. and countries abroad are properly prepared in the case of a human pandemic. In addition to preparing our healthcare and homeland security systems for a potential outbreak, both locally and nationally, your department has been tasked with readying our nation's agricultural prevention and eradication preparedness plan in order to control avian influenza in animals first and thus prevent a human pandemic from developing in this country.

As one of the leading regions in cutting-edge agricultural technology, the Delmarva Peninsula has direct experience with avian influenza and is well prepared with a rapid, cohesive, and proven agricultural health response strategy. In fact, yesterday I held an agricultural health summit in Georgetown, Delaware and was struck by the extent of the region's expertise and preparedness in avian influenza prevention and response. This summit was comprised of state agriculture officials, university academics, and poultry industry representatives with frontline knowledge. One reoccurring point made during this discussion was that in preparing the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, your department appears to be overlooking some critical "best practices," which have become a staple of biosecurity on Delmarva, including the use of the foam depopulation technique (humane euthanasia) and disposal through in-house composting.

I am particularly concerned that the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza proposes that a state transport infected birds for burial, which could contribute to the further spread of the virus, and could have adverse environmental consequences. In-house composting destroys all infected matter in one place and reduces the risk of the virus being spread. In addition, the foam depopulation technique allows for a mass depopulation of birds while importantly suppressing air borne particles and can be administered by far fewer response personnel than other techniques. These techniques were developed, tested, and are trusted methods on Delmarva.

Delmarva experts agree that the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza should be a "living document," easily digestible, and accessible in many languages to allow for rapid response to avian influenza. It is also essential that we have the ability to remove the red tape and respond in a clear, coordinated, and cohesive fashion, including access to adequate personnel and supplies.

It is my understanding that the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza will be officially released this week. While I support your efforts to improve agricultural health preparedness, I am concerned that this strategy may not include groundbreaking new technology and tactics, which are currently being utilized on the Delmarva Peninsula. Before we commit to spending billions on an avian influenza strategy, it is crucial that federal officials are well versed in proven advancements in this field. The National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza will serve as a roadmap for many states less experienced than Delmarva in preparing for avian influenza, and thus it is critical that such a plan contain comprehensive and up-to-the minute best practices.

For this reason, I respectfully request that you take action to immediately begin holding local meetings with experts from Delmarva and other key regions with expertise in animal health and avian influenza prevention and containment. I invited a representative from your Department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to attend yesterday's event in Georgetown, however I have been informed that permission for this person to attend the summit was not granted.

Our national preparedness system depends on effective cooperation between federal planners and regional, state, and local stakeholders. Please inform me of the steps your Department is taking to consult with experts from the Delmarva Peninsula and other relevant regions as soon as possible. I look forward to working closely with you on this critical issue and welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Michael N. Castle

Member of Congress