



United States Department of Agriculture

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Department of  
Agriculture

Marketing and  
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Programs

Washington, DC  
20250

Dr. Gwendy Reyes-Illg  
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Washington, D.C. 20003  
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August 12, 2022

Dear Dr. Reyes-Illg:

Thank you for your letter of July 26, 2022, requesting additional information about the use of whole house carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) gassing as a depopulation method during the current highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak.

I share your concern for the humane treatment of animals and appreciate your ongoing engagement with this issue. My colleagues and I take our responsibility to develop strategies, policies, and response mechanisms to effectively manage animals and livestock during foreign animal disease outbreaks very seriously. In the face of devastating diseases like HPAI, this responsibility often involves making difficult decisions—including those surrounding depopulation—to support rapid response and limit the overall scale and scope of an outbreak.

We appreciate the attention you have given to the work of Dr. Scott Beutelschies, who formerly served as an Emergency Coordinator with our Veterinary Services (VS) program and now serves as an Area Veterinarian in Charge. Dr. Beutelschies and other VS officials are a dedicated group of professionals who genuinely care about protecting the health and value of our Nation's animals. In animal health emergencies—including the ongoing HPAI outbreak—VS officials often serve as first responders and deploy to sites around the country to assist States and producers with response efforts. This type of work requires a significant amount of personal sacrifice, and we are extremely grateful for their contributions to protect American agriculture.

Since October 2017, when Dr. Beutelschies' webinar on CO<sub>2</sub> whole house gassing was posted to our Agency's YouTube channel, our program has refined its approach to HPAI depopulation. While we continue to devote resources to the development and use of whole house CO<sub>2</sub> gassing—including maintaining 18 whole house CO<sub>2</sub> units within our National Veterinary Stockpile—other depopulation methods have ultimately proven to be nimbler and more effective in this outbreak. Because applying CO<sub>2</sub> in an agricultural context is still an emerging practice, and the gas is produced on demand or as a byproduct of other industrial processes, there are still significant logistical limitations involving both

the quantity of gas available as well as the timely delivery of the gas to affected facilities.

We hope this information is helpful. Our program will continue to employ every available resource to combat the current HPAI outbreak and is committed to conducting further in-depth assessments to improve depopulation options at large poultry operations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Sifford', written in a cursive style.

Rosemary B. Sifford  
Deputy Administrator  
Veterinary Services