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ENERGY AND COMMERCE

ENERGY  
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October 8, 2020

Gregory Ibach  
Under Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Under Secretary Ibach:

As we experience the worst public health crisis in a century, the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic necessitates our most serious obligation to protect the health of our citizens. In that regard, I was recently made aware of a troubling situation in my congressional district in southwest Michigan and would appreciate your most immediate attention.

We have learned about potential cases of minks infected with SARS-CoV-2 at a Southwest Michigan farm. This must be addressed to ensure the safety of farmers, their workers, and the surrounding community.

This clearly appears to be following in the footsteps of an ongoing outbreak of the mink population in Utah. On August 25, 2020 the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) announced the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories had received samples of mink from two farms in Utah that tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. As was noted in the release, "Mink were known to be susceptible to SARS-CoV-2, as the virus was discovered in mink on multiple farms in the Netherlands.... Affected mink farms have also been identified in Spain and Denmark."

These concerning developments raise four time-sensitive questions outlined below:

- According to the CDC "the risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low," however even one case of COVID-19 is one too many. Is there any evidence of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from mink to humans, or from mink to other animals?
- What is USDA doing to identify and contain the spread of at mink farms?
  - What guidance is given once an infection is identified?
    - Are infected animals quarantined or euthanized?
- How is this information transmitted to state agricultural agencies?
- How is USDA and APHIS coordinating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to mitigate the spread of SARS-CoV-2 at mink farms?
- Given the fragile state of the agricultural economy, if an outbreak were to occur, what resources does USDA offer to assist farmers should they encounter a loss from SARS-CoV-2 infected minks?

This pandemic must be taken seriously. We must be vigilant and take no chances when it comes to the health of our community. I appreciate your vigilance in helping to protect our public health and safety as well as your commitment to our nation's farmers and ranchers to ensure the United States remains the gold standard in agricultural production and safety. I look forward to an expedient response to the questions above.

Sincerely,

Fred Upton  
Member of Congress

CC: CDC Director Robert Redfield