



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

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October 8, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As the United States works to eradicate COVID-19 in humans, we must recognize the threat posed by the spread of the virus to susceptible animals, leading to increased zoonotic transmission of variants between species. Continued transmissions have the potential to lead to new mutations of more transmissible and deadly forms of the virus that can undermine global vaccination and recovery efforts.

Title I of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 allocates \$300 million for the monitoring and surveillance of susceptible animals for incidence of SARS-CoV-2. Given the urgent threat posed by the spread of COVID-19 on mink farms, and the documented transmission of mutated COVID-19 from farmed minks to humans, we urge you to use a portion of this money to evaluate the risk of fur farms further exacerbating the current public health crisis. Specifically, we encourage the U.S. Department of Agriculture to use these funds to create a fur farm registry that would provide necessary transparency and accountability.

COVID-19 outbreaks have been confirmed on seventeen mink fur farms in Michigan, Wisconsin, Utah, and Oregon,<sup>1</sup> and there have been even more widespread outbreaks in Europe and Canada. Mink to human transmission of the virus has been reported in the Netherlands, Denmark, and Poland, and it has likely occurred in the U.S. as well. According to the CDC, “Investigations found that mink from a Michigan farm and a small number of people were infected with SARS-CoV-2 that contained unique mink-related mutations.”<sup>2</sup> The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control announced that coronavirus variants transmitted from mink could undermine the effectiveness of a vaccine as well as existing diagnosis and treatment options.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in December 2020, a wild mink captured near a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/dashboards/tableau/sars-dashboard>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/detection-new-sars-cov-2-variants-mink>

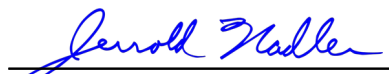
mink farm in Utah tested positive for a variant of COVID-19 indistinguishable from the virus found in nearby infected farmed mink – demonstrating the danger posed to wild populations.


All fur farms – not just those that breed mink – create an ideal environment for pathogens to circulate among and across species. To help curb the current pandemic and prevent the next one, we must gain a better understanding of the fur farming industry in the US. However, there is no way to know many total animals are bred and killed on fur farms in the U.S. each year, and there are no federal regulations that oversee the operation of fur farms. Data on mink farms are compiled by the USDA in an annual market report as part of its reporting on agricultural commodities, but no data are collected on fox, lynx, bobcat, or other animals farmed for fur. Not only does the lack of meaningful federal or state oversight mean that animals can be bred, housed, and killed in inhumane ways, but it also means that it is impossible to easily monitor the potential infectious diseases incubated or spread at these farms.

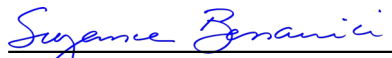
There is an opportunity to remedy this deficiency through the American Rescue Plan Act. The USDA should use a portion of the \$300 million allocated for the monitoring and surveillance to collect relevant information about fur farms and publicly make that information available. Mandatory registration of fur farms would shed light on the number of fur farms in the US, the geographical distribution of fur farms, the number of individuals of each species of fur-bearing animal being or that will be farmed in FY22, the number of farms that produce two or more species of fur-bearing animal, and the extent to which fur farms are complying with the latest guidelines and recommendations developed by the Department and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 and other diseases.

As the world fights this devastating pandemic, we cannot simply ignore conditions that incubate and alter the virus – or possibly allow a new pathogen to jump to humans. A portion of the \$300 million provided by the American Rescue Plan Act can be strategically applied to create transparency and oversight of the fur farming industry. We hope you will accept and swiftly implement our recommendations.

Sincerely,

  
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Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress

  
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Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



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Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



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Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



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Steve Cohen  
Member of Congress



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Danny K. Davis  
Member of Congress



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Madeleine Dean  
Member of Congress



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Peter A. DeFazio  
Member of Congress



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Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress



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Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



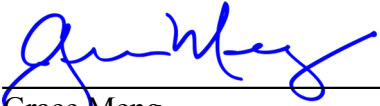
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Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress



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Lucy McBath  
Member of Congress



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Grace Meng  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Mike Quigley  
Member of Congress



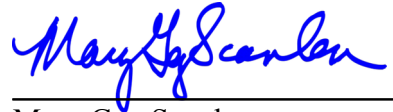
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Kathleen M. Rice  
Member of Congress



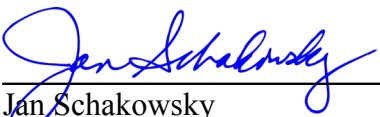
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Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



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