

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am Jamie Jonker, Chief Science Officer for the National Milk Producers Federation, a trade association representing dairy cooperatives and their 20,000 dairy farmer owners.

The National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) is the nation's first line of defense against high-consequence animal diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease, African swine fever, and highly pathogenic avian influenza. These threats could devastate livestock, rural economies, and food security, costing billions in losses and disrupting trade.

We've seen firsthand how essential this capacity is during the ongoing H5N1 outbreak in dairy cattle. Rapid diagnostic testing and coordinated surveillance through NAHLN labs have been critical not only for quickly identifying cases and containing spread but also for meeting testing requirements for interstate dairy cattle movement. NAHLN has also played a pivotal role in implementing the National Milk Testing Strategy, which confirmed that 34 states are free from H5N1 in dairy cattle. Without this network, these efforts would have been slower and less effective, risking severe economic and animal health impacts.

With increased NAHLN funding, USDA can expand laboratory capacity, enhance diagnostic technology, and strengthen IT systems for faster data sharing. Additional resources will enable more robust surge testing during outbreaks, broader surveillance coverage, and additional personnel. These investments will ensure NAHLN remains agile and prepared to protect animal health and maintain continuity of business across the dairy supply chain.

Simply put, NAHLN funding is a strategic investment in national security and agricultural stability. Strengthening this network will protect producers, consumers, and the integrity of our food system. Thank you.