

PRESS ADVISORY
For Immediate Release

Mass Extermination of 2.3 Million Birds at Hickman's Egg Farm to Trigger \$37.4 Million in Federal Bailouts

Hickman's Egg Farm loses

Public Foots the Bill for Industrial Cruelty as Egg Giants Profit from Crisis

Maricopa County, AZ — A newly reported avian influenza outbreak on May 19th at Hickman's Egg Ranch will result in the extermination of approximately [2.3 million egg-laying hens](#), with the company poised to receive **an estimated \$37.4 million in taxpayer-funded bailouts** under the USDA's indemnity program.

This staggering payout comes after a recent policy change under the Trump administration that **increased indemnity payments for egg-laying hens from \$7 to \$17 per bird**—meaning U.S. taxpayers now cover more than twice the cost per animal when factory farms suffer disease outbreaks, regardless of whether consumers support the egg industry.

The company operates 4 facilities in Arizona. This is the 3rd time the company has been hit with an avian influenza in the last several months with the first outbreak occurring in November and the last one occurring in January in which they lost [1.1 million birds](#). The company previously held 6 million birds in total.

On July 17th of last year, the Hickman's facility located in Tonopah [erupted in flames](#). The building lacked any fire suppression system such as sprinklers which are not mandated by federal regulations. [According to the Animal Welfare Institute \(AWI\)](#), most hen house farm fires occur in cage-free houses, according to the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) due to higher dust levels. Most hen house fires are started by an electrical malfunction. This incident is part of a concerning pattern, as Hickman's has experienced similar fires in the past, including a [2019 blaze at the same Tonopah facility](#) and a [2021 fire in Arlington, Arizona](#).

"When an egg empire repeatedly loses millions of intensively confined animals to fire and disease, and still gets rewarded with public money, that's not resilience—it's corporate protectionism," says veterinarian Crystal Heath, and executive director of the veterinary advocacy organization Our Honor.

Hickman's is a member of the [ProEgg cooperative](#), which has **ties to Cal-Maine Foods**, the largest egg producer in the United States. Cal-Maine previously received [\\$44 million in federal indemnity payments](#), even as the company's [revenues tripled](#) and its [stock price more than doubled](#) during the egg shortage caused by earlier outbreaks. Cal-Maine is currently being [probed](#) by the Department of Justice for its role in rising egg prices.

Other companies that are part of the conglomerate include Opal Foods and Herbruck's Poultry Ranch. An Investigate Midwest [article](#) exposed how these companies exterminated their birds using heatstroke in a controversial process known as Ventilation Shutdown plus (VSD+). A poll of veterinarians revealed only [1.1% believe](#) this is an ethical and humane method of depopulation though it is allowed in [constrained circumstances](#) by the American Veterinary Medical Association.

"This is a system where corporations are rewarded for the high risk business model of producing protein via intensively confined animals—then handed millions when those conditions inevitably result in disease outbreaks," says Heath. "Imagine if we invested even a fraction of these subsidies into disease-resistant, animal-free protein systems instead of propping up antiquated models of protein production."

The continued funneling of public funds to industrial egg producers highlights a dangerous feedback loop: as animal production facilities grow larger and more concentrated, disease risk increases—and so does the public cost of cleaning up the fallout.

A [study](#) published in Nature says that investing in food production methods that don't require slaughtering animals would save us \$7.3 trillion globally in health burdens and ecosystem degradation.

Key Facts:

- **2.3 million birds to be exterminated** at Hickman's Egg Ranch due to bird flu outbreak.
- **\$17 per bird indemnity** means **\$37.4 million taxpayer payout**.
- Hickman's is connected to **Cal-Maine Foods**, which has benefited from **tens of millions in federal subsidies** while posting **record profits**.

This case exemplifies how **industrial animal-based protein externalizes both its suffering and its risk**, leaving the public to subsidize cruelty, environmental damage, and pandemic threats—all while consolidating wealth in the hands of a few large corporations.

For press inquiries or interviews with veterinary or economic experts available to comment on this situation, please contact:

Crystal Heath, DVM
cheath@ourhonor.org
www.ourhonor.org
Phone: 925-212-3918