

November 3, 2015

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Via e-mail: agsec@usda.gov; tom.vilsack@usda.gov

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We, the undersigned, on behalf of the organizations below, are writing to express our dismay and to seek a reconsideration of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) decision to abdicate its responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act to promote the humane treatment of animals by [eliminating](#) any requirement that exhibitors test and treat elephants for tuberculosis (TB), despite overwhelming evidence that federal oversight is necessary.

As you know, TB is at an epidemic level among captive elephants. An [estimated 18 percent](#) of Asian elephants in the U.S. harbor the disease, which can easily spread to humans, even without direct contact. Because elephants can carry and shed the pathogen that causes TB without showing any overt signs of disease, early detection and prevention measures are imperative. For these reasons, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has warned that there is a "substantial need" for infection control practices in the captive elephant industry.

The USDA's announcement flies in the face of this and other [recommendations](#) by animal disease experts who have long called for strong regulation of TB in elephants. Over the last few years, the USDA has misled the public by [promising to adopt](#) meaningful TB standards, recognizing that the U.S. Animal Health Association's 2010 *Guidelines for the Control of Tuberculosis in Elephants* "provide the best approach for detecting and preventing the spread of TB" and should be adopted without "delay[ing] any longer." The agency has dragged its feet and now reversed course without any justification.

In its announcement, the USDA wrote, "We believe our efforts will continue to enable us to detect and stop the spread of TB in elephants." Considering that the agency is no longer requiring exhibitors to follow *any* standard on TB testing, treatment, and control, this statement is surely not credible. How do you intend to achieve this goal? We respectfully request an outline of the specific steps that the USDA will take to protect animal and human health from this potentially deadly disease.

Sincerely,

Rachel Mathews
Counsel

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Ed Stewart
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PETA Foundation

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