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Congress of the United States
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August 11, 2023

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write to you to request an update on the Canine Valley Fever Vaccine currently under review with the USDA-APHIS - Coccidioides Posadasii Vaccine, Avirulent Live Culture, Code 1431.R0 (unlicensed) from Anivive Lifesciences, Inc.

Valley Fever (coccidioidomycosis) is a fungal infection endemic to the southwestern United States contracted by breathing in fungal spores. Found in dry soil, Valley Fever is a significant health concern for both human and canine health in Arizona. Dogs are very susceptible to Valley Fever and experts at the University of Arizona's Valley Fever Center for Excellence estimate that the infection costs Arizona dog owners at least \$60 million per year for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care. In humans, this disease disproportionately affects people with weakened immune systems with rates typically highest among people aged 60 and older.

The potential of a Canine Valley Fever vaccine would significantly reduce the number of disease cases and address areas of great clinical need. This directly impacts the health of companion, service, police, and military dogs.

Not only does Valley Fever affect canines, but it also impacts humans. Approval of a canine vaccine would present a significant milestone in pursuing a desperately needed human vaccine and be a hallmark achievement in One Health which the USDA-APHIS has committed to developing in its 2023-2027 strategic plan to address complex public health challenges such as Valley Fever.

Below are some of the critical impacts of Valley Fever on humans in the State of Arizona:

- \$736 million per year incurred on the Arizona healthcare system.
- 100% increase in cases over the last five years.
- Native Americans Tribes are four times more likely to be infected.
- Rural workers face high risk due to extensive soil disruption that aerosolizes the fungus.

Recent studies show the actual incidence of Valley Fever in humans may be 33x higher due to underreporting, misdiagnosis, and visitors or newer residents to the state may not be as familiar with its symptoms.¹ The Arizona Department of Health Services reports that Valley Fever remained one of the most commonly reported infectious diseases in Arizona during the pandemic and the most common non-communicable infectious disease. As illustration, the number of Valley Fever cases is four times higher than all viral hepatitis infections combined.²

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter. I look forward to working alongside those in the administration to fight Valley Fever.

Sincerely,



Debbie Lesko
Member of Congress

¹ Impact and Control of Valley Fever: Proceedings of a Workshop in Brief (2023), National Academies.
<https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26928/impact-and-control-of-valley-fever-proceedings-of-a-workshop>

² <https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/index.php#data-stats>