

August 13, 2026

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Secretary Kennedy:

I write regarding the administration's calamitous response to the biggest outbreak of cyclosporiasis in US history,¹ and the extent to which the outbreak and botched response may be the result of incompetence and corruption. As Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), you are responsible for overseeing the federal government's response to this outbreak. Yet, the administration's handling of this crisis has been marred by missteps that raise serious questions about its decision-making. Moreover, political contributions and direct White House lobbying from Taylor Farms,² the company implicated in the outbreak, or its parent company, Taylor Fresh Foods, Inc., raise urgent questions about the role this influence-peddling may have played in loosening federal food safety oversight and hampering the federal government's response to the outbreak.

Cyclosporiasis is a gastrointestinal illness caused by the parasite cyclospora.³ Since the onset of the cyclospora outbreak in May 2026, nearly 14,000 cyclosporiasis cases have been reported nationally and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is investigating over 10,000 additional cases.⁴ Patients with cyclosporiasis can experience cramping, bloating, and diarrhea that

¹ CNN, "Cyclosporiasis outbreak has affected about 1 in every 1,000 people in Michigan and killed two," Deidre McPhillips, August 6, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/07/21/health/cyclospora-cases-count>; Food & Water Watch, "How Cyclospora Exploded Across the U.S. This Summer," Lauren Borsheim and Rebecca Wolf, August 11, 2026, <https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/2026/08/11/how-cyclospora-exploded-across-the-u-s-this-summer/>.

² Wired, "Taylor Farms Spent Big on MAGA and Anti-Regulatory Lobbying Before Diarrhea Outbreak," Kate Taylor, July 21, 2026, <https://www.wired.com/story/diarrhea-outbreak-taylor-farms-maga-donations-lobbying/>; Federal Election Commission, "Individual Contributions: MAGA Inc.," https://www.fec.gov/data/individual-contributions/?committee_id=C00892471&contributor_name=Taylor&two_year_transaction_period=2026.

³ CDC, "Surveillance of Cyclosporiasis," August 11, 2026, <https://www.cdc.gov/cyclosporiasis/php/surveillance/index.html>.

⁴ *Id.*

can last for weeks and, in some cases, months.⁵ To date, the outbreak has resulted in 2 deaths and at least 740 hospitalizations.⁶

The federal government's communications regarding the outbreak, including information about its cause, have been confusing, inconsistent, and incomplete. Indeed, Taco Bell provided earlier and seemingly clearer guidance to consumers than the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), CDC, and other federal food safety agencies.⁷

Four days after Taco Bell removed certain fresh produce items from their menus in a handful of states due to rising cases of cyclospora,⁸ the CDC linked the outbreak to an "unknown source" and noted an increase in cases in Michigan, Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia.⁹ Reporting from the Wall Street Journal recounts that shortly after federal agencies had identified Taylor Farms lettuce as a potential source of the outbreak, the company called White House and FDA officials "with an urgent plea" to delay a potential recall announcement.¹⁰ During the call — reportedly brokered by former White House official turned Taylor Farms lobbyist Trent Morse — the company allegedly requested "more proof" and "more time" before federal agencies attributed the outbreak to the company's products.¹¹

Taylor Farms lettuce was previously linked to a mass cyclospora outbreak that caused hundreds to fall ill in 2013.¹² In 2020, the company issued a recall after its products were potentially linked to Salmonella.¹³ And in 2024, Taylor Farms' onions were contaminated with E. Coli, "leading to one death and more than 100 illnesses."¹⁴ Indeed, less than one week ago, Taylor Farms issued another voluntary recall due to suspected Salmonella contamination of jalapeños.¹⁵

⁵ Nature, "'Explosive diarrhoea' outbreak grips US: how researchers are hunting its source," Max Kozlov, July 16, 2026, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-026-02225-w>; CNN, "Cyclosporiasis outbreak has affected about 1 in every 1,000 people in Michigan and killed two," Deidre McPhillips, August 6, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/07/21/health/cyclospora-cases-count>.

⁶ CDC, "Investigation Update: Cyclospora Outbreak, July 2026," August 5, 2026, <https://www.cdc.gov/cyclosporiasis/outbreaks/07-26/investigation.html>; New York Times, "Two Deaths Linked to Cyclosporiasis in Michigan," Caroline Hopkins Legaspi, August 4, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/03/well/eat/cyclospora-deaths-michigan.html>.

⁷ Washington Post, "Authorities investigate Taco Bell and lettuce as cyclosporiasis outbreak surges," Lena H. Sun, July 14, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2026/07/14/authorities-investigate-taco-bell-lettuce-multistate-cyclosporiasis-outbreak/>.

⁸ Columbus Dispatch, "Taco Bell updates menu as Ohio deals with explosive diarrhea outbreak," Alex Perry, July 10, 2026, <https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/2026/07/10/taco-bell-menu-change-explosive-diarrhea-outbreak-ohio-us/90862571007/>.

⁹ CDC, "Cyclosporiasis Outbreak with Unknown Source," July 14, 2026, <https://web.archive.org/web/20260714172454/https://www.cdc.gov/cyclosporiasis/outbreaks/07-26/index.html>.

¹⁰ Wall Street Journal, "Taylor Farms Called White House to Try to Delay Cyclospora Recall," Sabrina Siddiqui, Jesse Newman, and Josh Dawsey, July 24, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/health/taylor-farms-cyclospora-recall-delay-call-41fef0bc>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² CBS News, "What to know about Taylor Farms, the produce giant tied to the cyclospora outbreak," Megan Cerullo, August 3, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/taylor-farms-cyclospora-outbreak/>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ New York Times, "Taylor Farms Voluntarily Recalls Fresh Jalapenos Over Salmonella Concerns," Alexandra Petri, August 9, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/08/09/business/taylor-farms-jalapenos-salmonella.html>.

Reportedly, the White House “was convinced by the FDA’s findings” and authorized the public release linking lettuce from Taylor Farms to the cyclospora outbreak.¹⁶ On July 17, the CDC stated that “[e]pidemiologic and traceback data show that iceberg lettuce from Taylor Farms de Mexico is contaminated with *Cyclospora* and is making people sick.”¹⁷ That same day, the company issued a nationwide recall of its lettuce.¹⁸

However, it remains unclear to what extent the apparent intervention by Taylor Farms delayed the public announcement, or resulted in changes to its content – and the confusion from Trump Administration officials only continued. On July 18, the FDA reported that lettuce from Taylor Farms tested positive for cyclospora.¹⁹ A day later, the FDA noted that the test was a false positive, yet the agency nevertheless affirmed that there is “overwhelming epidemiological data” that lettuce from Taylor Farms de Mexico was associated with the current outbreak.²⁰ Taylor Farms claimed that the FDA had “apologized”²¹ for the false positive test results, but the FDA denied the claim and the company subsequently removed it from its social media site.²²

This sequence of events reveals the Trump administration’s “myriad missteps” in responding to the largest cyclospora outbreak in US history.²³ Taylor Farms’ attempts to influence the government’s public health response are equally alarming and raise questions about whether the government’s public health decisions may have been influenced by corporate interests.²⁴

¹⁶ Wall Street Journal, “Taylor Farms Called White House to Try to Delay Cyclospora Recall,” Sabrina Siddiqui, Jesse Newman, and Josh Dawsey, July 24, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/health/taylor-farms-cyclospora-recall-delay-call-41fef0bc>.

¹⁷ CDC, “Investigation Update: Cyclospora Outbreak, July 2026,” August 5, 2026, <https://www.cdc.gov/cyclosporiasis/outbreaks/07-26/investigation.html>.

¹⁸ FDA, “Investigation of 15-State Outbreak of Cyclospora Illnesses: Iceberg Lettuce (July 2026),” August 5, 2026, <https://www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/investigation-15-state-outbreak-cyclospora-illnesses-iceberg-lettuce-july-2026>.

¹⁹ BBC, “Test that found source of US explosive diarrhoea outbreak was false positive,” Kathryn Armstrong, July 20, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gw9n1kx9do>.

²⁰ FDA, “Investigation of 15-State Outbreak of Cyclospora Illnesses: Iceberg Lettuce (July 2026),” August 5, 2026, <https://www.fda.gov/food/outbreaks-foodborne-illness/investigation-15-state-outbreak-cyclospora-illnesses-iceberg-lettuce-july-2026>; Post on X by FDA, July 20, 2026, https://x.com/US_FDA/status/2079238466118865220?s=20; BBC, “Test that found source of US explosive diarrhoea outbreak was false positive,” Kathryn Armstrong, July 20, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gw9n1kx9do>.

²¹ Newsweek, “Taylor Farms Says FDA Has Apologized Over ‘False Positive’ Cyclospora Test,” Khaleda Rahman and Anna Skinner, July 22, 2026, <https://www.newsweek.com/taylor-farms-says-fda-has-apologized-over-false-positive-cyclospora-test-12216498>.

²² Wired, “The FDA Says It Didn’t Apologize to Supplier Linked to Diarrhea Outbreak, Actually,” Kate Taylor, July 20, 2026, <https://www.wired.com/story/taylor-farms-fda-explosive-diarrhea-tweets/>.

²³ Wall Street Journal, “Taylor Farms Called White House to Try to Delay Cyclospora Recall,” Sabrina Siddiqui, Jesse Newman, and Josh Dawsey, July 24, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/health/taylor-farms-cyclospora-recall-delay-call-41fef0bc>.

²⁴ *Id.*

Political Contributions and Influence-Peddling Raise Questions About the Trump Administration's Response

Taylor Fresh Foods, Inc. has donated millions to political organizations aligned with the President, including more than \$1 million directly to MAGA Inc., and has hired a former Trump White House official to lobby on its behalf.²⁵

These investments appear to be closely timed to favorable regulatory actions — decisions that were good for Taylor Farms, but appear to have increased the risk of food safety problems like the ongoing cyclosporiasis outbreak.

On March 20, 2025, with the support of large food producers, the Trump administration delayed an FDA food traceability rule that would have prevented more Americans from getting sick from food-borne disease outbreaks like this.²⁶ The rule set standard processes for reporting high-risk foods and would have likely aided disease investigators to more quickly trace produce contaminated with cyclospora.²⁷ Less than a week after the FDA rollback,²⁸ public filings reveal that Taylor Fresh Food, Inc. made a \$1 million donation to MAGA, Inc.,²⁹ President Trump's SuperPAC. A few months later on June 13, 2025, Taylor Fresh Food, Inc. contributed another \$100,000 to a Trump-aligned PAC with the same Treasurer as MAGA Inc.³⁰ Just a few weeks later, on July 1, 2025, the Trump administration announced that it would end the mandatory reporting of cyclospora along with five other food-borne pathogens, to the CDC's Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet), hampering the agency's ability to monitor dangerous foodborne infectious illnesses.³¹

The Trump administration's systematic dismantling of the food safety system has hampered the federal government's ability to prevent, identify, and respond to the latest outbreak. Deep funding cuts forced the CDC's Parasitic Division to slash staff responsible for tracking and identifying

²⁵ Wired, "Taylor Farms Spent Big on MAGA and Anti-Regulatory Lobbying Before Diarrhea Outbreak," Kate Taylor, July 21, 2026, <https://www.wired.com/story/diarrhea-outbreak-taylor-farms-maga-donations-lobbying/>.

²⁶ Washington Post, "FDA retracts test result but still links Taylor Farms lettuce to cyclosporiasis," Lena H. Sun, July 20, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2026/07/20/taylor-farms-still-linked-parasite-outbreak-despite-false-positive-fda-says/>; FDA, "FSMA Final Rule on Requirements for Additional Traceability Records for Certain Foods," March 20, 2025, <https://www.fda.gov/food/hfp-constituent-updates/fda-intends-extend-compliance-date-food-traceability-rule>.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ Forbes, "Here's Where The Cyclosporiasis Outbreak Stands After Taylor Farms' False Positive," Mary Whitfill Roeloffs, July 21, 2026, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maryroeloffs/2026/07/20/heres-where-the-cyclosporiasis-outbreak-stands-after-taylor-farms-false-positive/>.

²⁹ Federal Election Commission, "Individual Contributions: MAGA Inc.," https://www.fec.gov/data/individual-contributions/?committee_id=C00892471&contributor_name=Taylor&two_year_transaction_period=2026.

³⁰ Federal Election Commission, "Individual Contributions: More Jobs, Less Government," https://www.fec.gov/data/individual-contributions/?committee_id=C00693838&contributor_name=taylor&two_year_transaction_period=2026.

³¹ NBC News, "The CDC quietly scaled back a surveillance program for foodborne illnesses," Aria Bendix, August 26, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/cdc-quietly-scaled-back-surveillance-program-foodborne-illnesses-rca227089>.

parasites like cyclospora from 11 to 3.³² USDA's Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, a research hub that includes two research labs that investigate and sequence cyclospora, is being forced to close and relocate.³³ And personnel cuts pushed out around 3,500 federal workers at the FDA and nearly a quarter of the CDC's workforce, including doctors and scientists who could have aided in this outbreak response.³⁴ As one report noted, "[f]ewer staff has meant all facets of the outbreak investigation have been slowed — from simple data entry to complex laboratory analysis of genetic information."³⁵

If these changes were motivated solely by ideology it would reflect a dangerously bad set of policies by the Trump administration. But the specter of corruption – and quid pro quo politics – casts a darker shadow over these actions, particularly if political contributions from Taylor Farms' parent company may have influenced policy changes that subsequently endangered millions of Americans.

HHS must proactively reaffirm that its decision-making has been objective and free from political interference or industry lobbying by a major Trump-aligned donor.

Conclusion and Questions

On July 21, you said that the cyclospora outbreak was "under control."³⁶ Since then, two Americans have died and thousands more have been sickened as the outbreak continues, and millions more are seeking clarity from federal public health officials.³⁷ Instead of delivering answers, a senior HHS official dangerously minimized the severity of the outbreak, calling it nothing more than "a couple of cases of diarrhea."³⁸

To fulfill my legislative responsibility to ensure that Americans' public health and the integrity of our food safety system have not been compromised by the appearance of corruption, I request that you provide responses to the following questions by August 27, 2026:

³² CNN, "Trump's funding cuts created 'the perfect storm' that slowed the government's cyclosporiasis response," Blake Ellis, Brenda Goodman, Audrey Ash, and Melanie Hicken, July 20, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/07/20/health/trump-cyclosporiasis-outbreak-cdc-response-invs>.

³³ Bloomberg, "Lab Closures Threaten Cyclospora Research as Parasite Outbreak Sickens Thousands," Kristina Peterson and Elizabeth Elkin, July 16, 2026, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-07-16/cyclospora-lab-closures-risk-setting-back-parasite-research>.

³⁴ STAT, "What was lost at the FDA," Lizzy Lawrence, May 7, 2026, <https://www.statnews.com/2026/05/07/fda-rebuilding-after-doge-former-regulators-speaking-out/>; Federal News Network, "CDC plans hiring push to fill gaps from last year's widespread layoffs," Jory Heckman, March 25, 2026, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2026/03/cdc-plans-hiring-push-to-fill-gaps-from-last-years-widespread-layoffs/>.

³⁵ CNN, "Trump's funding cuts created 'the perfect storm' that slowed the government's cyclosporiasis response," Blake Ellis, Brenda Goodman, Audrey Ash, and Melanie Hicken, July 20, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/07/20/health/trump-cyclosporiasis-outbreak-cdc-response-invs>.

³⁶ USA Today, "RFK Jr. says cyclosporiasis 'under control,' rebukes criticisms," Sara Moniuszko, July 21, 2026, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2026/07/21/rfk-jr-cyclosporiasis-outbreak-under-control/90994932007/>.

³⁷ Michigan Health & Human Services, "Infectious Disease Outbreaks," <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/keep-mi-healthy/infectious-diseases/infectious-disease-outbreaks>.

³⁸ Post on X by Calley Means, August 3, 2026, <https://x.com/calleymeans/status/2084440318309519567>.

1. What protocols does the FDA have in place to verify test results for false positives before releasing results to the public?
 - a. Why did the FDA decide to reevaluate their initial positive test determination for cyclospora on Taylor Farms' produce?
 - b. Did the FDA opt to reevaluate the positive cyclospora test result because of outreach from Taylor Farms or any of its representatives?
 - c. Did the FDA opt to reevaluate the positive cyclospora test result because of a request from a political appointee at the White House, CDC, FDA, or HHS?
 - d. Please provide a transcript of the reported call between the White House, Taylor Farms, and FDA officials prior to the Taylor Farms recall announcement.³⁹
 - e. What other specific communications did FDA, HHS, or White House officials have with Taylor Farms or its representatives regarding the recall announcement?
 - f. If testing for false positives is a standard part of the FDA's testing procedures, why was the positive result communicated to the public prior to a reevaluation of the test sample in question?
2. Please provide a copy of all communications, meeting transcripts, and notes, between the CDC, FDA, and Taylor Farms or its representatives regarding the cyclosporiasis outbreak.
3. Since May 2026, how many cyclosporiasis cases have been confirmed?
4. How many cyclosporiasis cases are currently under examination?
 - a. The CDC has noted that, "[t]he true number of sick people in this multistate outbreak is likely higher than the number reported."⁴⁰ Please provide the CDC's assessment of the number of unreported cases of cyclosporiasis infection.
5. What is HHS's estimate of the average annual cost to track, trace, and treat outbreaks of cyclosporiasis? Please provide a breakdown of estimated costs for each year from 2016-2025.
6. What is HHS's estimate of the cost to track, trace, and treat the 2026 cyclosporiasis outbreak?
7. How many of the states previously required to report information about cyclospora infections under the FoodNet surveillance system have ceased reporting cases to the CDC since July 2025?

³⁹ Wall Street Journal, "Taylor Farms Called White House to Try to Delay Cyclospora Recall," Sabrina Siddiqui, Jesse Newman, and Josh Dawsey, July 24, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/health/taylor-farms-cyclospora-recall-delay-call-41fef0bc>.

⁴⁰ CDC, "Investigation Update: Cyclospora Outbreak, July 2026," August 5, 2026, <https://www.cdc.gov/cyclosporiasis/outbreaks/07-26/investigation.html>.

- a. Please provide a breakdown of states that have continued to report cases and those that have not.
8. How many personnel at the CDC, FDA, and HHS have been diverted from their regular assignments to assist in the cyclospora outbreak?
9. Was the FDA's March 2025 decision to delay the FSMA Final Rule on Requirements for Additional Traceability Records for Certain Foods influenced by Taylor Fresh Food, Inc.'s political contributions, or company outreach to White House or FDA officials?
 - a. Please provide a summary of all communications with the company on this matter.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator