

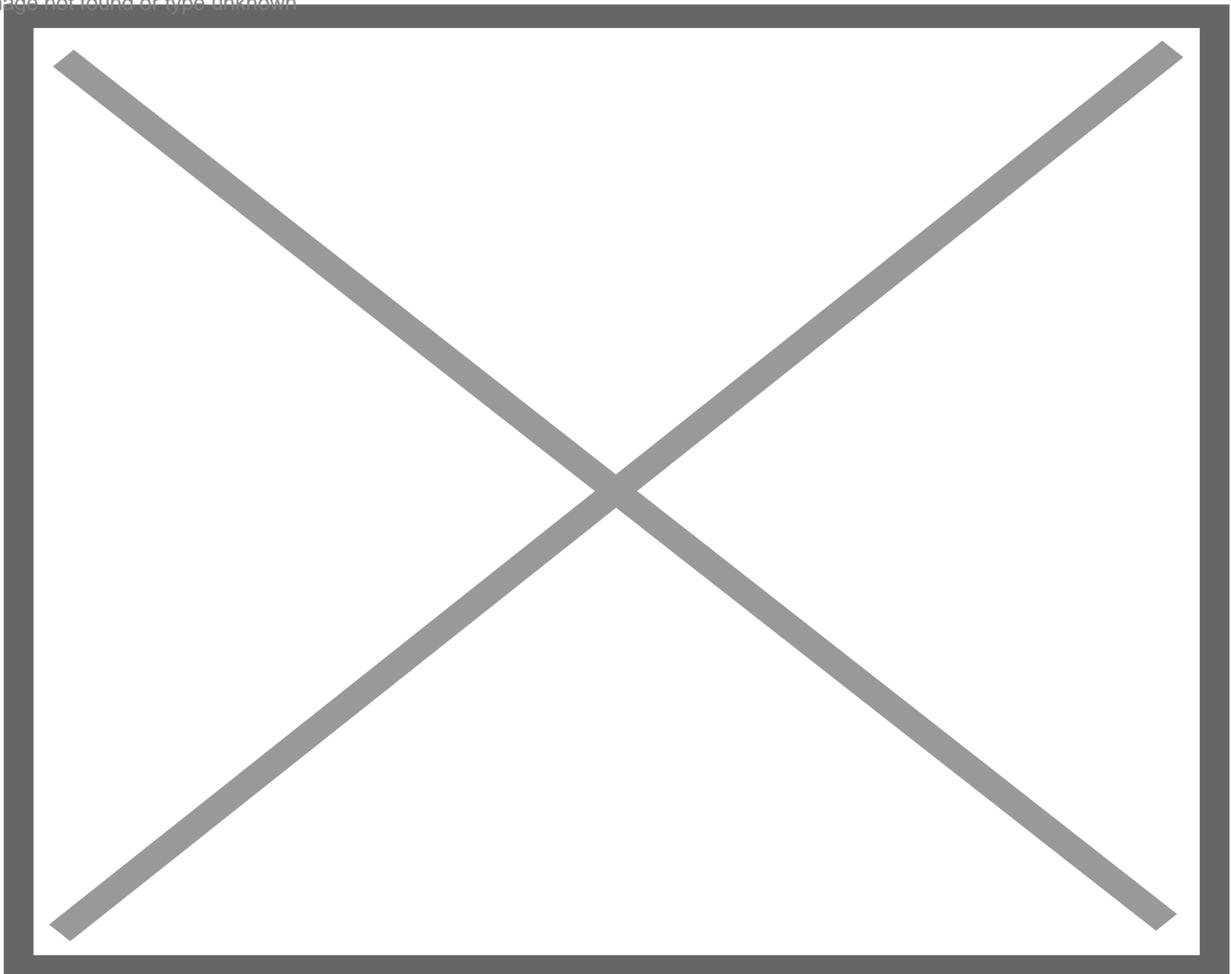
Egg Prices Surge in USVI and Across the U.S. as DOJ Launches Investigation

The U.S. DOJ has launched a probe into potential anti-competitive practices among major egg producers. Amid the ongoing bird flu outbreak, prices have surged nationwide, with costs in the U.S. Virgin Islands significantly exceeding mainland averages.

Agriculture / **Published On March 08, 2025 08:55 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **March 08, 2025**

Image not found or type unknown



The U.S. Department of Justice has initiated a probe into the dramatic surge in egg prices across the country, a development that has drawn attention from both consumers and policymakers amid an ongoing avian influenza outbreak and rising cost-of-living concerns.

The investigation, reported by The Wall Street Journal and Forbes on March 7, aims to determine whether major egg producers have engaged in anti-competitive practices, such as collusion to inflate prices or restrict supply, or if the price hikes are solely attributable to external factors like the bird flu crisis.

Egg prices have reached unprecedented levels, with the average cost of a dozen large, Grade A eggs hitting \$4.95 in January 2025 in the U.S., according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics—surpassing the previous record of \$4.82 set in January 2023. The cost of a dozen of eggs in the U.S. Virgin Islands are even higher, hitting \$12.99 for certain grades. In some U.S.-mainland regions, prices have climbed higher than the current U.S. average of \$4.95, with reports of a dozen eggs retailing for as much as \$10.99 in San Francisco and \$8.41 in the Midwest.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has forecasted a potential 20.3% increase in egg prices throughout 2025, citing the devastating impact of bird flu, which has led to the culling of over 166 million birds since 2022, including 27 million since President Donald Trump took office in January.

The DOJ's investigation comes as the Trump administration faces mounting pressure to address a key campaign promise: lowering grocery costs for American families. During a primetime address to Congress on March 4, President Trump acknowledged the issue, stating, "The price of eggs has gotten out of control, and my administration is working hard to get it back down." He framed the effort as part of a broader commitment to combat what he called the "inflation nightmare" inherited from the previous administration. However, Trump did not elaborate on specific measures tied to the DOJ probe during his speech.

The investigation is still in its early stages, and it remains unclear whether it will lead to civil or criminal charges. Sources familiar with the matter, as cited by The Wall Street Journal, indicate that the DOJ is scrutinizing major producers, including companies like Cal-Maine Foods and Rose Acre Farms, to assess whether they have artificially manipulated supply or pricing. Antitrust attorney Lisa Phelan told the outlet that such inquiries are routine when supply chain disruptions coincide with sharp price increases, noting, "There can be anticompetitive efforts to deal with the crisis, and that is not OK either."

The bird flu outbreak, which has decimated egg-laying hen populations, is widely regarded as the primary driver of the current shortage. Emily Metz, CEO of the American Egg Board, noted the industry's challenges, telling The Wall Street Journal, "Farmers know people are frustrated, and they are frustrated too by the situation. They know they are not able to put out the volume of eggs that people want." The USDA has maintained its policy of culling affected flocks to contain the spread of the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), a practice that has continued unchanged under the Trump administration.

In response to the crisis, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins announced a \$1 billion initiative in February to bolster biosecurity measures, reimburse affected farmers, and fund research into vaccines and treatments for poultry. "American farmers need relief, and American consumers need affordable food," Rollins wrote in a Wall Street Journal editorial. "To every family struggling to buy eggs: We hear you, we're fighting for you, and help is on the way."

Despite these efforts, critics, including some Democrats, argue that the administration's actions have been insufficient or misdirected, pointing to early executive orders pausing health agency communications as potentially exacerbating the situation.

House Democrats, led by Rep. Jimmy Gomez (D-Calif.), have pressed the administration to act more decisively. In a February letter, they wrote, "Mr. President, you've promised the American people that you would lower grocery prices. It's time to deliver. Families across the country cannot afford more delays or inaction."

Meanwhile, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt has deflected blame, asserting during a January briefing that the Biden administration’s policies, including the culling of “more than 100 million chickens,” set the stage for the current shortage—a claim that overlooks the standard nature of such measures across administrations.

Experts caution that its scope of the DOJ investigation may not fully resolve the underlying supply issues tied to avian influenza. David Ortega, a food economics professor at Michigan State University, told ABC News, “The White House is limited in how much influence it has over the price of goods in a free market.” For now, American consumers and farmers alike await clarity—and relief—as the administration navigates this politically charged and economically pressing challenge.

© Viconsortium 2025