

June 18, 2026

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
1400 Independence Avenue Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20250
Delivery via email: Brooke.Rollins@usda.gov

RE: Request for Immediate Release of Records Substantiating USDA's Public Claims Regarding Ridglan Farms

Dear USDA Secretary Rollins:

Rise for Animals writes in response to [your June 15, 2026 public statement](#) claiming that USDA “investigated conditions at Ridglan Farms, conducted inspections, and held the facility accountable under the law,” and that these agency actions “led to” Ridglan Farms ceasing operations as a dog-breeding facility and selling or otherwise agreeing to transfer its remaining 475 dogs to rescue groups.

The public should be able to reconcile your claims with USDA records. At present, we cannot.

According to USDA's posted [2014 through 2026 inspection records](#) for Ridglan's Class A license, USDA documented noncompliance items on only four occasions. All four were designated by USDA as “non-critical.” That classification is especially striking because three of the four non-compliance items involved inadequate veterinary care and inadequate animal treatment records—the same classes of violations that formed the basis for serious state-level action against Ridglan and its lead veterinarian.

Further, even though two of USDA's four “non-critical” findings were documented in 2026—*after* state authorities had evidenced hundreds of regulatory violations related to veterinary care and record-keeping—USDA's records do not document federal enforcement action. One record specifies that Ridglan “instituted corrective actions at the time of the inspection,” and the other provides Ridglan with a week in which to take corrective action.

Taken together, USDA's inspection records—memorializing the onsite visits often presented as the agency's primary mechanism for holding regulated entities accountable under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA)—do not document the kind of federal action or leveling of accountability your

public statement suggests took place. To the contrary, Ridglan repeatedly relied on USDA's inspection history to defend itself against allegations of wrongdoing.

The present public record does not appear to show that USDA sought to hold Ridglan accountable outside of official inspections, either. Of the [three formal complaints](#) filed by Rise for Animals and The Marty Project (TMP) in 2025, USDA effectively dismissed one, and its handling of the other two remains unknown and the subject of pending FOIA requests:

- In April 2025, Rise for Animals and TMP submitted a formal complaint to USDA, raising concerns about Ridglan's classification of dogs under the AWA. The complaint explained that Ridglan's lead veterinarian, Dr. Richard Van Domelen, had publicly claimed that all of Ridglan's dogs were "research" animals, despite USDA inspection records reflecting that the overwhelming majority of Ridglan's dogs had been counted under its Class A breeder license (rather than its Class R research registration). USDA did not treat this contradiction as a basis for even further inquiry. Instead, [USDA's Animal Care complaint response](#), signed by repeat Ridglan inspector Scott Welch, stated that reporting guidance was "not 100% clear" and "could be interpreted" in different ways. Ultimately, USDA "did not find that there was a non-compliance" in how Ridglan tracked, reported, or classified dogs—failing to take any action in the face of well-founded concerns that Ridglan could seek to shield itself from state enforcement action by administratively transferring dogs from its breeding operation to its federal Class R research operation, beyond the purview of state authorities.
- In September 2025, Rise for Animals and TMP urged USDA to act based on records showing that the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) intended to cite Ridglan for 311 violations of state law and regulations governing animal care. Those violations included 308 counts of improper and/or inhumane handling tied to "cherry eye" surgeries characterized as constituting veterinary malpractice. We specifically asked USDA to coordinate with DATCP pursuant to its cooperative authority under 7 U.S.C. § 2145(b) and initiate federal proceedings.
- In October 2025, Rise for Animals and TMP again called upon USDA to act after Wisconsin's Veterinary Examining Board summarily suspended the veterinary license of Ridglan's lead veterinarian. The Board found that, since at least 2008, Dr. Van Domelen had engaged in serious and routine violations, including the improper delegation of surgical and dental procedures to unqualified personnel; failure to use anesthesia or pain control before, during, or after surgical procedures; unprofessional conduct evidencing a lack of knowledge or ability; and repeated gross, serious, or grave negligence. We explained to USDA that these state findings appeared to bear directly on Ridglan's compliance with federally required programs of adequate veterinary care and, therefore, appeared to fall squarely within USDA's regulatory purview.

These submissions placed USDA on notice of specific evidence bearing on Ridglan's compliance with federal regulatory requirements and identified USDA's available authority to coordinate with state officials and pursue federal action. Thousands of members of the public also contacted USDA, urging intervention on behalf of Ridglan's dogs and underscoring the gravity and urgency of the concerns before the agency.

Yet, to our knowledge, USDA did not take action commensurate with your statement. Indeed, the first known public disclosure of any additional USDA action came in a [separate public statement released on June 15, 2026](#). In that statement, you said that, "prior to today's announcement, USDA informed the facility that if it fails to voluntarily cancel its federal Animal Welfare Act Class A breeder license by July 1, we will begin termination proceedings." This threatened license termination is more specific than your general references to USDA's investigations, inspections, and accountability efforts concerning Ridglan, but both its timing and effect remain unclear.

Termination of Ridglan's Class A license may have imposed a consequence independent of the state settlement by foreclosing sales to federally regulated research facilities that might otherwise have remained below Wisconsin's licensing threshold. By October 2025, however, Ridglan had already agreed through state proceedings to surrender by July 1, 2026, the Wisconsin license required for its large-scale dog breeding-and-sale operation. USDA's threatened proceedings therefore appear to have been timed to take effect on the same date as a preexisting state deadline that already foreclosed Ridglan's continuation of its large-scale commercial breeding operation.

The presently available record does not establish what USDA's threatened proceedings independently accomplished, or whether they caused or materially contributed to Ridglan's ultimate closure. If USDA contends that this threat supplied the accountability described in your public statements, USDA should release records showing when the threat was communicated, the factual and legal grounds for the proposed termination, and the effect USDA understood the threat to have on Ridglan's decision to close.

USDA should likewise substantiate your broader public claims that USDA held Ridglan accountable and took actions that led to Ridglan's closure and the transfer of its remaining 475 dogs to rescue groups.

Rise for Animals has pending FOIA requests seeking records that should exist if your public claims are true. But USDA need not wait for FOIA processing—and, if it has achieved what you claim it has, then it should not want to. If USDA held Ridglan "accountable under the law" and that accountability spurred Ridglan's decision to discontinue its dog-breeding operations and allow for the rescue of its dogs, then USDA should want to release the records proving it.

The [text and graphic of your written public statement](#) also appear to conflate Ridglan's Class A dog-breeding operation with the fate of all 475 remaining dogs, including dogs understood to be held under Ridglan's Class R research registration. To the extent USDA claims credit for securing the transfer of *all* 475 dogs, USDA should also release records showing what actions, if any, it took with regard to Ridglan's federally-registered Class R research program, including any action taken to facilitate the release of the 150 dogs remaining under its control.

If the requested public records exist, we ask that USDA release them immediately. If they do not, we ask that USDA correct the public record.

For the animals,



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