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What Ohio Farmers Should Know about Avian Influenza in Birds

Avian Influenza, or “bird flu,” is a virus that can cause a varying amount of disease among birds. A large-scale outbreak in commercial poultry in Ohio could result in serious economic ramifications for the state because of the interdependency of poultry production and other business enterprises involving veterinary medicine, grain production, feed manufacturing, transportation, food processing and sales, and others.

Ohio’s poultry and egg production, valued at more than \$566 million, ranks fifth among agriculture industry segments in Ohio. The total economic impact of this industry to Ohio, including processing, is estimated at \$2.6 billion. Ohio ranks behind only Iowa in total egg production, with 27 million layers producing 7.3 billion eggs a year. Ohio has more than 41 million broilers valued at more than \$101 million and ranks 11th in turkey production, with 5.8 million turkeys valued at \$92 million.

General Background

Highly pathogenic avian influenza causes a severe, extremely contagious illness and death among infected birds, and while some strains could be infectious to people, the chance of infected poultry entering the food chain would be extremely low.

The Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Division of Animal Industry is charged with protecting and promoting the health of Ohio’s livestock and poultry industries. It does so in the following ways:

Import Requirements

State law requires all livestock and poultry brought into Ohio to have a certificate of veterinary inspection to ensure the animals are free of disease. If highly pathogenic avian influenza were confirmed in another U.S. state, Ohio would ban imports of birds from the affected state.

Surveillance & Monitoring

The department has provided surveillance for avian influenza on commercial poultry populations for more than 20 years. Tests are conducted at the Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory, which has a veterinary virologist trained by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to conduct sensitive and specific tests to detect avian influenza.

Current efforts include surveillance testing for commercial poultry from industry-collected blood samples. In 2004, the department tested more than 10,200 blood samples. In 2005, more than 14,000 blood samples were tested. In 2006, the laboratory expects to test about 30,000 samples. In addition, market birds from auction sites are sampled and tested for the presence for the virus. Seven locations are sampled monthly from October through March of each year (the time when avian influenza is most prevalent). Flocks sampled from the market auctions include backyard and exhibition birds.

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If the Ohio laboratory would find a “highly likely” case of avian influenza, it would be sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, Iowa for confirmatory testing, which could be complete within three days.

Laboratory Support

Ohio’s nationally accredited ADDL provides test support for animal disease control programs, as well as diagnostic laboratory services for veterinarians and livestock and poultry producers in the state. As a member the USDA National Animal Health Lab Network, the ADDL also has the responsibility to provide rapid and comprehensive diagnostic response to emergency disease outbreaks.

The ADDL has a new Biosafety Level 3 lab, which is designed to provide safe and efficient handling of samples containing highly pathogenic agents. This facility opened in 2006 and has the capability to test 230 samples per day, or 1,610 samples per week, using state-of-the-art DNA testing techniques. The staff includes veterinary pathologists, virologists, bacteriologists, and toxicologists that work with veterinarians, producers, and flock owners in the diagnosis of disease outbreaks.

Industry Standards

The industry’s Ohio Poultry Emergency Disease Plan provides standards for producers to follow. For more information, go to the Ohio Poultry Association’s Web site at www.ohiopoultry.org.

What Farmers Can Do Now

Ohio’s poultry farmers should do their part to protect against this disease:

- **Monitor flocks** for unusual signs of illness such as “snicking” (sneezing) or at least a 1 percent decrease in egg production or increase in mortality. Other signs to look for are wheezing, lethargy, and depression. Report signs of infection to your veterinarian or to the Ohio Department of Agriculture by calling toll-free 800-282-1955. Submit samples for testing by contacting the department’s ADDL at 614-728-6220.
- **Practice personal biosecurity.** People can carry the virus in their respiratory tracts. If you know you have been in a poultry house in an outbreak area or otherwise exposed to the virus, do not enter another poultry house for three to five days. Wear poultry house shoes and clothing only in poultry houses and nowhere else. Change clothes before going to another poultry house complex on the same farm.
- **Keep unauthorized visitors out** of poultry houses, a good practice whether there is a disease threat or not. Authorized persons should be required to wear protective clothing and shoes before entering a house. If people must enter poultry houses – such as industry or utility service people, regulatory inspectors, feed trucks, or mortality collectors – keep a record of who they are, their telephone numbers, where they last visited, and where they’re going next.

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- ***Avoid contact with wild birds*** – they may be carriers of avian influenza viruses. Keep waterfowl away from poultry houses and do not dress waterfowl anywhere on a poultry farm. Avoid contact with backyard flocks of chickens, ducks, geese, and other birds – they present an increased risk of avian influenza exposure. Avoid contact with live-bird markets, swap meets, and poultry exhibitions, or wait three to five days to re-enter your poultry houses.
- ***Don't move farm vehicles or equipment*** on and off your farm without cleaning and disinfecting before and after use.

What to Know if Your Farm Becomes Infected

In the event of an outbreak, ODA, in conjunction with USDA, would operate under the State Emergency Operations Plan Animal Disease Incident Annex, which provides for quick and effective containment of any disease outbreak. ODA is responsible for quarantining facilities and disposal of animals during any animal disease outbreak, including avian influenza.

For more details on quarantine procedures, depopulation and disposal, and recovery, see Ohio Department of Agriculture Fact Sheet “How Ohio Would Respond to an Outbreak of Avian Influenza in Birds.”

Protecting Yourself against Avian Influenza

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have adopted guidelines for protecting farmers and bird workers against avian influenza. To read more, go to www.pandemicflu.gov/health/#workers.

For More Information

Farmers may call the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Division of Animal Industry at 800-282-1955 with questions or concerns, or visit one of these web sites:

State of Ohio Flu Web site – www.ohiopandemicflu.gov

Ohio Department of Agriculture – www.ohioagriculture.gov/avian

U.S. Department of Agriculture – www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/birdbiosecurity/ or www.usda.gov/birdflu

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/

Ohio Poultry Association – www.ohiopoultry.org

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services – www.pandemicflu.gov