

PREVENTING AVIAN INFLUENZA: THE NON-COMMERCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Avian Influenza – A Problem

Avian influenza (AI) is a viral infection of birds which has been around for many years. The USDA is undertaking an eradication program of killing and burying all diseased flocks. While there is some indemnification for killed birds, it is only partial and has resulted in severe economic loss for whomever owns the diseased poultry and the contract farmer whose house the diseased birds were in.

Because of the structure of the commercial poultry industry and the events which many non-commercial or hobbyist poultry people attend, there is considerable movement of poultry and individuals associated with poultry across state lines and around the countryside. Whether your poultry interests are large or small, everyone needs to exercise caution when coming in contact with another poultry person or their birds. The virus is believed to be transmitted from one infected flock to another flock by mechanical means. This could be people's clothing which can be contaminated with poultry manure or dust which is harboring the virus. Infected birds moving from one place to another or equipment which has been on AI-infected premises may become contaminated and when moved to a non-infected premise may act as vector for AI. A major problem with this disease is that the incubation period is approximately 10-14 days. Therefore, apparently healthy birds can be transmitting the virus to other birds before the diseased birds show symptoms. This is why one of the major precautions with this disease is to avoid contact with other poultry.

Symptoms and Diagnosis

The symptoms of AI are varied and require laboratory confirmation. The virulent or hot form of this strain of AI demonstrates edema or accumulation of fluid in the comb and wattles, blueness of the head area, and severe production drops. Severe cases will show hemorrhaging in the shanks and high mortality. The less virulent forms may not show these severe symptoms but this form is still important to eradicate. That is why laboratory diagnosis is important. The N.C. Department of Agriculture Animal Diagnostic Labs can test a bird's blood serum for exposure to AI in your flock. There is no charge to you for this service. Additional information on AI may be obtained from the N.C. Poultry Federation, any County Extension Service office or the NCDA Diagnostic Laboratories.

Precautions

Precautions which a person should take:

1. Avoid taking birds to all shows and exhibits when AI is around.

2. All avian species can be carriers and all flocks should be fenced or confined to avoid contact with wild fowl.
3. Buy stock only from sources you are sure are AI clean and particularly not from quarantine areas.

Commercial poultry operations have found that the additional precautions and sanitation which they are observing have helped them with other disease problems which they have had to live with. You may find the same benefits. Whether you are involved with poultry on a large scale or small scale, loss of your birds and expense of cleaning your premises due to Avian Influenza will affect YOUR POCKETBOOK.