AVIAN INFLUENZA – A GOOD TIME TO TIGHTEN BIOSECURITY

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Recently, there have been several confirmed reports of avian influenza (AI) in poultry flocks in the United States and Canada. Some of these have been highly pathogenic, causing a high percentage of mortality in affected flocks. In response to these outbreaks, a great deal of time and effort must be spent quarantining and testing adjacent flocks. This virus does not discriminate between large or small flocks, or husbandry type. Large commercial flocks have been infected, as have small hobby flocks. In response to confirmed AI outbreaks, many countries refuse to allow poultry and egg shipments from affected states. Because of the public health and economic consequences, it is important for **all** poultry owners to do everything they can to prevent infection in their flocks.

Avian influenza is caused by a virus. It is not uncommon for wild birds (esp. waterfowl and shorebirds) to carry this virus. As these birds migrate, influenza can spread long distances quickly. The wild birds often don't show any signs of sickness, but continue to spread the virus in their feces. Domestic poultry (including chickens, turkeys, pheasants, ducks, geese, quail, and guineafowl), as well as pet birds, can be infected by exposure to wild waterfowl, or their droppings. This exposure could be to the wild birds or their feces directly, or exposure to contaminated shoes, clothing, crates or other equipment.

If your birds are sick or dying, call DATCP at 1-800-572-8981. If you notice dead wild birds, call the DNR's hotline at 1-800-433-1610.

BIOSECURITY While biosecurity is always important, bird owners should be especially vigilant at this time. The United States Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) has a web site with a great deal of information about biosecurity for birds: http://healthybirds.aphis.usda.gov/

Biosecurity means doing everything you can to keep diseases out of your flock. "Bio" refers to life, and "security" indicates protection. Biosecurity is the key to keeping your poultry healthy. It is what you do to reduce the chances of an infectious disease being carried to your farm, your backyard, your aviary, or your pet birds, by people, animals, equipment, or vehicles, either accidentally or on purpose.

Some suggestions to improve biosecurity include:

1. **Isolate your flock from other birds, both wild and domestic**
   - keep feed in covered feeders, preferably inside the house to discourage wild birds from feeding
   - if birds are allowed outdoors, eliminate standing water that may attract wild birds
   - screen windows to make them bird-proof
   - eliminate nesting sites for sparrows and other common birds
   - change shoes / have dedicated footwear or disposable boots for use in your facilities
   - clean and disinfect any equipment before it enters your facility
2. **Keep your facilities free of rodents**
   - eliminate nesting sites for rodents (excess equipment, covered areas, etc.)
   - store feed in rodent-proof containers
   - keep open feed in hanging feeders
   - keep surrounding areas clean and keep grass mowed short or consider a gravel buffer strip
   - consider traps, baits, etc. as necessary
3. **Don't bring a disease home with you**
   - although visiting other flocks, bird shows, etc. can be fun, consider the risk
   - if you are around other birds, shower and change clothes before attending to your birds
   - source new birds from clean flocks
   - if possible, all-in, all-out management is best, rather than mixing birds of different ages
4. **Be alert for signs of illness in your birds**

SIGNS OF AVIAN INFLUENZA There are numerous strains of AI virus. These are usually classified as LPAI (low pathogenic AI) or HPAI (highly pathogenic AI), depending on the severity of their effects. Similar to human influenza viruses, AI viruses mutate frequently, so pathogenicity can change over time.

LPAI strains may cause very few signs in birds, and may go unnoticed. They usually cause mild to moderate respiratory illness and there is often a decrease in egg production, if the birds are laying. Secondary infections may be a problem in these birds as well. LPAI may be discovered after an infection occurred by blood-testing for antibodies against AI.

HPAI strains are quite severe. Birds die quickly without showing signs. There is often discoloration and swelling of the comb, wattles, and hocks, as well as respiratory illness and diarrhea. Internally, there may be hemorrhages in various organs. Mortality may approach 100%.

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HUMAN DISEASE Although it is rare, humans can get AI from birds. For the past decade, a strain in Asia, Europe, and Africa (H5N1) has infected humans and caused a number of deaths. Currently, this strain has not been found in the U.S. There is no known risk of human illness from the current strain in the U.S. at this time.

DATCP has more information and will be adding current updates at their web site:
http://datcp.wi.gov/Animals/Animal_Diseases/Avian_Influenza/

Dairy Situation and Outlook

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Dairy product prices and in turn farm milk prices are holding steady. On the CME, butter started out in March at $1.78 per pound and has declined to $1.68. But, cheddar cheese actually showed strength with 40-pound blocks going from $1.545 to $1.57 per pound, but declined to$1.55 on the 19th. Barrels went from $1.4925 to $1.56 per pound, but declined to $1.52 on the 19th. Nonfat dry milk prices for the West were below $1 per pound and have strengthened to around $1.05. Dry whey prices have weakened some from $0.48 to $0.45 per pound. Both the March Class III and Class IV price will be a little higher than in February, but much lower than a year ago. The March Class III price will be near $15.55 compared to $15.46 in February and $23.33 a year ago. The March Class IV price will be near $14.15 compared to $13.82 in February and $23.66 a year ago.

Reports of continued good sales of butter and cheese have supported these dairy product prices. The last stock report was for January 31st stocks. Other than nonfat dry milk stocks, stocks levels remain fairly tight. Butter stocks were just 2.9% higher than a year ago with American cheese stocks 0.3% higher and total cheese stocks 2.7% higher. But, nonfat dry milk stocks were 60.8% higher. The growth in nonfat dry milk stocks was the result of production being 19% higher than a year ago and January exports 10% lower. Over 50% of nonfat dry milk production was being exported a year ago with this dropping to just 37% in January.

Dairy exports have not been a factor in stable prices for butter, cheese or dry whey. According to the US Dairy Export Council, dairy exports were at their biggest slump in January since 2012. Compared to January a year ago, butterfat exports were down 75%, cheese down 26%, dry whey down 15% and lactose down 23%.On a total milk solids basis January exports were just 11.2% of U.S. milk production compared to a high of 17.7% for March of last year and an average of 15.4% all of last year. While world prices seem to have bottomed out and now show some strength U.S. product prices are still not competitive on the world market with the strength in the U.S. dollar. Dairy exports are expected to improve some the last half of the year as China increases its imports, Russia lifts its ban on imports from the EU countries and a slower growth in world milk production than last year.

It still appears that milk prices may not fall as low this spring as earlier predicted and also be a little higher for the last half of the year. Dairy futures have declined some the last few days but still remain optimistic with Class III over $16 by June, over $17 by September and holding at that level through the remainder of the year. Class IV futures are over $15 by July and $16 by September and holding at this level for the remainder of the year. But, with milk production entering the seasonal flush and exports soft these prices could be optimistic, at least through July. It will depend a lot on milk production for the months ahead. Lower feed prices than a year ago only partially offset much lower milk prices so margins to producers are also much lower than a year ago. The January milk-feed-price ratio was 2.09 compared to 2.46 a year ago.

Current trends in milk production are supportive of higher milk prices. Compared to a year ago, U.S. milk production was estimated to by 2.2% higher for January, but just 1.7% higher for February. The number of milk cows continue to increase, but at slow pace with just 3,000 head more than January. Of the 23 reporting states, just two states, California and Pennsylvania had fewer milk cows than a year ago, five had the same number of cows and sixteen had more cows. For the U.S., the number of cows was 1.1% higher than a year ago. Five states had lower milk per cow, two had no change and 16 had more milk per cow. The slow down in the growth in milk production was a small increase in milk per cow of just 0.5%. Only two states had less total milk production than a year ago, California and New Mexico.

It is significant that the leading milk producing state continues to experience a decline in milk production. Compared to a year ago, California's milk production was down 2.6% in January and 3.8% in February. While California had 0.1% fewer cows, lower milk production was due to 3.7% less milk per cow. The second leading dairy state, Wisconsin had 0.5% more cows and 3.9% more milk per cow increasing milk production by 4.3%. Milk production was relatively strong in other Upper Midwest states with Minnesota up 4.3%, Iowa up 4.8%, and South Dakota up 9.6%. In the Northeast, milk production was up 2.3% for New York, 2.0% for Pennsylvania and 2.4% for Ohio with Michigan up 7.8%. Milk production increases for some other states show Texas up 4.2%, Idaho 1.5%, and Arizona 2.9%. Even Florida had an increase of 4.3%.

We can expect total milk production to pick up during the spring flush that could strain the capacity of some manufacturing plants in the Upper Midwest and the Northeast and put some downward pressure on milk prices. But, if the growth in milk production compared to a year ago continues less than 2% as it did in February, then there is optimism that milk prices could average higher than earlier forecasted, but still average $6 to $7 lower for the year than last year.