

Avian Influenza Battle Is Still Not Finished

Just as smoldering embers can restart a major fire, so poultry producers in the Northeast should not count on last winter's avian influenza epidemic as being totally wiped out.

Recent reports from Pennsylvania, as well as New York City, Ohio and Connecticut, indicate that the potentially deadly H₅N₂ avian influenza virus is still in circulation and represents far-flying sparks threatening all poultry producers in the Northeastern and Mid-Atlantic states.

The 1986 outbreak is complicated by the fact that live poultry markets in the New Jersey-New York City area have served as reservoirs of infection. In this connection, contaminated shipping crates, trucks and other handling equipment used by dealers continue to be possible vectors for spreading the malady to farm flocks throughout a wide geographical area.

That's the word from Edward T. Mallinson, Extension poultry veterinarian at the University of Maryland. Dr. Mallinson is an associate professor at the College Park campus of the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine.

Mallinson emphasizes that specialty producers supplying live poultry markets or auctions should insist that dealers coming to their farms use clean, disinfected crates, coops, trucks, catching hooks, crowding devices, forklifts and other handling equipment. This is doubly important if the entire flock is not to be completely depopulated in one swoop.

When some chicks are to be left on the farm, producers also have a right to expect that catching crews wear freshly laundered coveralls and sneakers or cleaned and disinfected boots, Dr. Mallinson declared.

Unfortunately, Mallinson observed, some people seem to have trouble understanding that it doesn't necessarily require a sick bird brought into a flock from an outside source to bring avian influenza and several other infectious diseases onto someone's poultry premises. These maladies also are easily spread by particles of contaminated dust, debris and manure.

Although they are invisible, infectious disease organisms can be present on these small particles in enormous numbers, he pointed out.

Dr. Mallinson admits that producers may have to pay extra for insisting on sanitary hauling practices by dealers. But the benefits derived can well be peace of mind, healthier and more productive

birds, and the feeling of being a good farming citizen.

He notes that avian influenza does not present a hazard to human health. But it can cause high death losses among various types of poultry with severe financial loss to owners and keepers. ●

Keep Waterfowl Away From Chickens, Turkeys and Game Birds

This is the time of year when wild waterfowl get the nesting urge. And many of them — particularly mallard ducks — are not timid about where they place their nests. They'll crawl under chicken houses and other outbuildings, often a surprising distance from water, to hide their caches of hatching eggs.

No one knows exactly why "Mother Nature" arranged for ducks, other web-footed birds, and various seabirds to be one of nature's main carriers of avian influenza viruses. But, at least, we do know they are. They may not exhibit symptoms of the infection; but their infected droppings can carry high numbers of influenza viruses which can, under optimal conditions, wreak havoc on chickens, turkeys and game birds.

So producers should keep two major points in mind, says Edward T. Mallinson, Extension poultry veterinarian at the University of Maryland in College Park.

1. Discourage wild waterfowl from nesting under or near poultry houses.

2. Keep all web-footed birds away from chickens, turkeys and game birds; even domestic waterfowl can be carriers of avian influenza.

Dr. Mallinson theorizes that seabirds and waterfowl (web-footed birds) have reached a state of accommodation or compromise with avian influenza viruses over many generations. For reasons not fully known — perhaps different basic habitats or genetics — other kinds of birds, such as chickens, turkeys and game birds (quail, guinea fowl, pheasants, etc.) have not reached the same level or type of accommodation.

Medical history has shown many times that when a disease common to one population jumps to a population where it has not been common, the new group can suffer heavy death losses. A good example in human medical history was heavy death losses among American Indians when they contracted certain diseases carried by early white settlers in the United States. A somewhat similar situation appears to exist between web-footed and other kinds of birds.

As a preventive measure against avian influenza, national and international veterinary specialists alike are admonishing farmers these days to practice segregation in their poultry activities.

Keep web-footed birds away from those that aren't web-footed. Even better, make a choice on one type or the other.

You'll probably be better off to specialize in one kind of fowl in order to develop a quality product. The alternative is dealing with a menagerie and its inherent risks of hidden and obvious health problems. ●

PIJAC Activates 800 Telephone Number for Legislative/Regulatory Update Information

Responding to the increased amount of legislative activity within the pet industry in recent months, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) has activated an inbound WATS telephone line. The new 800 number will enable PIJAC members, members of state and local pet organizations and hobby clubs, and the media to receive instant updates on the status of legislation or rule-making proceedings in various jurisdictions, according to Richard Peterson, PIJAC President.

Legislators, regulators, the media and others are encouraged to use PIJAC through this number as a central clearinghouse on the status of legislative and

regulatory procedures and to obtain information on model laws for various aspects of the pet industry.

The number, 800 553-PETS, is a direct tie to PIJAC headquarters in Washington, D.C. PIJAC staff will respond to caller requests for information during normal working hours (9 to 5:30 Eastern).

Peterson emphasized that information available through the new 800 line encompasses legislative and regulatory activities only. The new communications aid is not meant to supplant the use of regular telephone lines for routine business calls to the organization. ●