

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Walt Helmick, Commissioner



304-558-3708

www.agriculture.wv.gov



Facebook: West Virginia Department of Agriculture



Twitter: @WVDeptofAg

NEWS RELEASE
September 3, 2015

Contact: Buddy Davidson
Communications Officer
304/558-3708; 304/541-5932 (cell)
bdavidson@wvda.us

GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS MEET TO PREP FOR POSSIBLE AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK

Charleston, W.Va. – West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) staff and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) counterparts met with representatives of other state and federal agencies Wednesday to prepare for the possibility of an avian influenza (AI) outbreak in the state this fall.

In the wake of the largest AI outbreak in U.S. history earlier this year, agriculture officials fear that eastern states may be vulnerable when wild birds migrate south for the winter. The U.S. Department of Agriculture believes that wild birds may have been the source of the outbreak this spring that affected many states in the West and Midwest.

“We want to be as prepared as possible to protect our poultry industry, which is the largest single agricultural sector in West Virginia,” said Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick. “Any AI outbreak will require the cooperation of a wide variety of organizations, so it’s critical that we reach out to the appropriate contacts and make sure we’re all on the same page.”

AI poses no threat to human health in North America, but it could deliver a major economic blow to West Virginia’s \$350 million-a-year poultry industries. A rapid and effective response can help prevent the spread of any disease, as well as minimize the chance that viruses can mutate into more dangerous strains.

The meeting served as a refresher course on existing WVDA emergency response protocols, as well as an AI backgrounder for other agencies, including USDA – Natural Resource Conservation Service, WV Department of Environmental Protection, WV Bureau for Public Health, USDA – Wildlife Services, WV Division of Natural Resources, WVU Extension Service and WV Division of Military Affairs and Public Safety.

West Virginia was affected by low-pathogenicity H7N2 AI in 2002 and low-pathogenicity H5N2 AI in 2007. Only one farm was affected in West Virginia in each of those cases.

WVDA tests every commercial flock before it leaves the farm for processing. Following the 2002 incident, the Department instituted a more aggressive education and surveillance program for so-called “backyard” flocks – small traditional flocks that are at a higher risk of coming into contact with sick wild birds.

-more-

AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK, *cont.*

Although backyard birds and commercial poultry are highly unlikely to directly contact each other, AI virus can survive on equipment tires, boots – even in human nasal passages – so the health of backyard birds can be critical to the health of commercial flocks.

WVDA State Veterinarian Jewell Plumley urged all poultry producers to institute and maintain thorough biosecurity procedures. For example, farmers should limit visitors to essential personnel only, equipment should not be moved between farms, and producers should be vigilant for signs of AI. Signs of AI include a lack of energy, decreased egg production, diarrhea, stumbling, respiratory problems, and swelling and/or purple discoloration of comb, wattles and hocks.

Anyone observing such symptoms in their flock should immediately contact WVDA Animal Health Division at 304-558-2214 or 304-538-2397.

###