



NEWS RELEASE
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WVDA URGES EXTRA CAUTION FOLLOWING INDIANA AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK

Charleston, W.Va. – The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) is prepared if avian influenza (AI) shows up in the Mountain State, Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick said following new reports of the disease in commercial turkey flocks in Indiana last week.

There has been no sign of the disease in West Virginia, and the outbreak poses no risk to food or human health. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is responding to the situation in Indiana.

The outbreak is especially concerning in light of the AI outbreak in spring 2015 that became the worst animal disease outbreak in U.S. history. From December 2014 through June 2015, a high-pathogenicity strain of AI (HPAI) affected 48 million poultry on 223 premises in the West and Midwest.

“Substantial planning is already in place due to past incidents of avian influenza here in West Virginia, and USDA is on the affected farms in Indiana,” said Commissioner Helmick. “However, the risk is definitely elevated, and we’re encouraging our growers to be especially vigilant and to be very strict when it comes to their biosecurity measures.”

The warning applies to both commercial growers and “backyard” poultry farmers who keep smaller numbers of birds for eggs or meat. Backyard birds are at an even greater risk due to their exposure to the environment and wild birds that are known to carry AI.

West Virginia previously dealt with AI in 2002 and 2007. Extra safeguards were developed and refined following those incidents, but they are no guarantee against AI finding its way into domestic fowl in the Mountain State.

WVDA tests every commercial flock before they are moved from the farm for any reason, ensuring that sick birds are not being trucked past other poultry farms in the region. The regional laboratory in Moorefield – in the heart of poultry country – is able to perform a wide range of tests, including rapid screening tests.

AI is an enormous threat to the economic well-being of the U.S. poultry industry and has substantial implications on international trade. West Virginia’s poultry industry alone is worth more than \$350

million annually, not counting valuable breeding operations. AI also is very expensive to contain and eradicate. The cost of response to the 2015 outbreak was upwards of \$1 billion, according to USDA.

Recommended biosecurity practices include:

- Minimizing farm visitors. AI can survive on vehicle tires, footwear – even in the nasal passages of humans.
- Clean and disinfect shoes, clothes, hands and tires before entering production areas. Clean all visible dirt and then apply disinfectant.
- Don't share farm equipment during AI outbreaks.
- Be on the lookout for signs of disease (unusual bird deaths, sneezing, nasal discharge, diarrhea, poor appetite, drop in egg production, purple discoloration of wattles, comb and legs).
- Call the WVDA if you think your birds might be sick. Call the Moorefield office at 304-538-2397 during regular business hours. Call 304-558-2214 and leave a message after regular business hours.

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The West Virginia Department of Agriculture protects plant, animal and human health through a variety of scientific, regulatory and consumer protection programs, as mandated by state law. The Commissioner of Agriculture is one of six statewide elected officials in West Virginia. For more information, visit <http://www.agriculture.wv.gov/Pages/default.aspx>.