

News Release
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**AG COMMISSIONER HALTS LIVE POULTRY EXHIBITIONS, SALES AND
SWAP MEETS ON AVIAN INFLUENZA CONCERNS**

Live poultry exhibitions, sales and swap meets have been banned in West Virginia as a precaution related to the avian influenza (AI) outbreak that has affected much of the United States, according to West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick.

“There has been no sign of AI in this state, but we believe this ban is a necessary precaution to protect our valuable poultry industries,” said Commissioner Helmick.

West Virginia’s broiler, or meat chicken, industry is centered in the Eastern Panhandle, near the Pilgrim’s Pride processing plant in Moorefield. The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) tests every commercial flock for AI before they are moved for processing, ensuring that sick birds are not being trucked past other poultry farms in the region.

“We have the staff and equipment to turn samples around within four hours, which is something the industry really appreciates,” said State Veterinarian Dr. Jewell Plumley. Any presumptive positive tests must be confirmed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), she added.

The WVDA has also worked to identify and educate “backyard” poultry owners about the signs of AI and biosecurity practices to prevent it.

Because they typically roam outdoors, backyard flocks are more likely to come into contact with wild birds that serve as reservoirs for AI viruses and that are thought to be spreading the current outbreak. Commercial poultry are housed exclusively indoors, which reduces the chance of coming into contact with wild birds and the waterways they frequent.

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. A squirt of disinfectant is not adequate. Clean all visible dirt before disinfecting to be safe.
- 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.

As of May 21, more than 40 million domestic birds have been affected by the AI outbreak. Three strains are currently circulating in the U.S. – H5N8, H5N2 and H5N1 – none of which are considered human health threats. Any viruses would be killed by cooking poultry to 165 degrees Fahrenheit regardless.