

## News Release

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### **AVIAN INFLUENZA CONCERNS HALT POULTRY EXHIBITS AT TWO WEST VIRGINIA FAIRS**

Live poultry will have to stay home from this year's State Fair of West Virginia and the Tri-County Fair because of concerns that the avian influenza (AI) that has affected much of the United States might be spread to poultry-producing areas of this state.

West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick used his authority to ban live birds from the State Fair, held each year in Fairlea. The Tri-County Fair in Petersburg didn't need an order. The Fair Board cancelled live poultry events on its own.

"I realize this may be a disappointment to some people, but the poultry industry is extremely valuable and it is critical that we protect it as much as we can," said Commissioner Helmick. "Prevention is the first, best option we have."

Petersburg is in the heart of the state's broiler (meat chicken) industry. Fairlea is close to a large commercial turkey breeding operation. Poultry is West Virginia's most valuable agricultural sector by far, employing thousands and accounting for hundreds of millions of dollars in economic impact.

The broiler 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 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 April 30, more than 15 million domestic birds in 13 states 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.**