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USDA Confirms Highly Pathogenic H7 Avian Influenza in a Commercial Flock in Lincoln County, Tennessee

March 5, 2017, Washington – The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has confirmed the presence of highly pathogenic H7 avian influenza (HPAI) of North American wild bird lineage in a commercial chicken breeder flock in Lincoln County, Tennessee. This is the first confirmed case of HPAI in commercial poultry in the United States this year. The flock of 73,500 is located within the Mississippi flyway.

Samples from the affected flock, which experienced increased mortality, were tested at Tennessee’s Kord Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory and confirmed at the APHIS National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa. Virus isolation is ongoing, and NVSL expects to characterize the neuraminidase protein, or “N-type”, of the virus within 48 hours.

APHIS is working closely with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture on a joint incident response. State officials quarantined the affected premises and birds on the property will be depopulated to prevent the spread of the disease. Birds from the flock will not enter the food system.

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture is working directly with poultry workers at the affected facility to ensure that they are taking the proper precautions to prevent illness and contain disease spread. As a reminder, the proper handling and cooking of poultry and eggs to an internal temperature of 165 °F kills bacteria and viruses.

As part of existing avian influenza response plans, Federal and State partners are working jointly on additional surveillance and testing in the nearby area. The United States has the strongest AI surveillance program in the world, and USDA is working with its partners to actively look for the disease in commercial poultry operations, live bird markets and in migratory wild bird populations.

USDA will be informing the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) as well as international trading partners of this finding. USDA also continues to communicate with trading partners to encourage adherence to OIE standards and minimize trade impacts. OIE trade guidelines call on countries to base trade restrictions on sound science and, whenever possible, limit restrictions to those animals and animal products within a defined region that pose a risk of spreading disease of concern.

These virus strains can travel in wild birds without them appearing sick. People should avoid contact with sick/dead poultry or wildlife. If contact occurs, wash your hands with soap and water and change clothing before having any contact with healthy domestic poultry and birds.

All bird owners, whether commercial producers or backyard enthusiasts, should continue to practice good biosecurity, prevent contact between their birds and wild birds, and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to State/Federal officials, either through their state veterinarian or through USDA's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593. Additional information on biosecurity for can be found at www.aphis.usda.gov/animalhealth/defendtheflock.

Additional background

Avian influenza (AI) is caused by an influenza type A virus which can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese and guinea fowl) and is carried by free flying waterfowl such as ducks, geese and shorebirds. AI viruses are classified by a combination of two groups of proteins: hemagglutinin or "H" proteins, of which there are 16 (H1–H16), and neuraminidase or "N" proteins, of which there are 9 (N1–N9). Many different combinations of "H" and "N" proteins are possible. Each combination is considered a different subtype, and can be further broken down into different strains. AI viruses are further classified by their pathogenicity (low or high)— the ability of a particular virus strain to produce disease in domestic chickens.

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