

Compiled by Rob Knecht, Vice President of Operations at Konos, Inc., and President of Michigan Allied Poultry Industries for The Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the US Senate: "Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza: The Impact on the U.S. Poultry Sector and Protecting U.S. Poultry Flocks."

July 7, 2015

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Stabenow, and all members of the committee: Thank you for inviting me to testify today on behalf of Michigan Allied Poultry.

Protecting Michigan's Poultry

As the country's 7th largest producer of eggs and 15th largest in turkey production, Michigan's poultry producers took action when the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) hit commercial poultry operations in the Midwest. Specifically, the Eurasian H5N2 impacted 1.95 million egg laying hens as close as Southern Wisconsin, two commercial turkey farms in Ontario, Canada just East of Michigan, a small backyard flock in Indiana just South of Michigan's Southern border as well as a small number of migratory geese on the East side of Michigan. The overall impact includes almost 50 million commercial poultry throughout the US. This report describes four things:

1. What specific biosecurity changes have been made to poultry operations based on the HPAI outbreaks.
2. How the poultry industry in Michigan partnered on the biosecurity initiative to protect the states poultry.
3. A synopsis of how HPAI changed how Michigan producers view biosecurity.
4. A list of other simple changes made to Michigan farms.

Biosecurity upgrades, changes, and improvements

Throughout the announcements of HPAI outbreaks, many theories of WHY and HOW the virus spread to different flocks ran through the industry. This specifically outlines two of the major changes companies in Michigan implemented in order to protect the commercial poultry of the state.

Hiring specific crews of employees that handle hen handling tasks. In poultry production, there are a variety of tasks that happen once, twice, or three times in the life of the bird that take a great deal of labor over a short period of time. For example, when egg laying hens are moved from the pullet barn (where the birds are reared prior to egg production) to the laying barns (where the birds will live during the time that they are producing eggs), there needs to be as many as 10 to 12 people over a two to four day time period enlisted to move the birds. In order to do this, many companies relied on outside or contract labor to do this. The other tasks that take this type of influx of labor include moving the day-old chicks into their respective homes, vaccination, beak treatments, moving the birds out of the laying barns at end of a cycle, and cleaning/disinfecting of barns after each movement of a flock in or out of a barn. Generally, to employ a crew that is solely dedicated to a single farm was cost prohibitive to the operation, thus an outside operation was used.

As of today, there are many companies in Michigan that will be engaged in some sort of exclusive relationship with a group of labor that will complete all of the tasks dedicated to a flock. These employees, along with the employees that are working in the barns on a daily basis, have the closest interaction with the birds and need to be the cleanest. These tasks include (but are not limited to) moving birds at the different ages of their lives, vaccinations, beak treatment, and other tasks that require large amount of labor in a short amount of time. A higher level of control can be placed on these crews. The more control a company has over the crews that move the birds, the less likely for a virus to spread. It is very likely that crews that moved birds at one facility could have spread the virus to other farms in the outbreaks in Iowa, Minnesota, other states.

‘Shower in, shower out’ at all facilities for employees in direct contact with poultry as well as vehicle washing. Outside of the afore mentioned bird crews, two of the most likely vectors for transmission of avian influenza are the other people working in the poultry houses on a daily basis as well as the vehicles coming to the farm. From a personnel perspective, daily chores in a given hen house are completed by a ‘house manager’. These chores put this person into direct contact with many of the birds in that house. From a vehicle perspective, Michigan poultry farms (egg laying hen facilities, turkey facilities, and broiler facilities) have materials moving off and onto their farms in semi-tractors and trailers daily. There are also employee cars and traffic moving on and off the farm each day. There are also grain trailers, manure trailers, and other heavy equipment moving on and off farms daily as well.

To clean people, Michigan’s poultry farms engage a few different strategies. In the short term, some companies partnered with hotels in the area of Michigan where the farm is located. The ‘house managers’, bird crews, or anyone else that would be in direct contact with the birds are funneled to the local hotel and the egg producer covers the cost of a few hotel rooms that act as a de facto locker room facility to clean each person. At that time, they are given other clothes, shoes, or both. They are then transported via company owned van that has been cleaned and disinfected to the farm where they will be doing their work. Another short term strategy includes the purchase of a mobile shower unit. This unit is pulled by a truck and boasts three stalls where employees can shower and change their cloths. The unit only needs to be plugged in and hooked up to a water source (the water is heated by the on-board propane unit) to be a “rolling biosecurity” unit. In the long term, some poultry farms in Michigan plan to construct on-site shower and locker facilities. The facilities act as an employee in-take area where all employees, no matter where they work, will park, change their clothes into company provided uniforms and disperse from there to their respective areas of work. Assuming there is a contaminated individual or vehicle, the virus would be stopped at this point.

To clean vehicles, there are multiple strategies as well. First, Michigan producers are putting disinfectant mats at every entrance to their farms. The disinfectant is refreshed daily in many cases and more often when necessary. Second, there are some egg operations that are doing additional spraying of disinfectant of the wheels and wheel-wells of every vehicle that comes onto the facility. Next, many poultry operations in Michigan (and other states) are requiring a full truck wash (there are wash facilities that specialize in large truck cleaning) and wash ticket (record of the washing be completed) prior to entry onto the farm. Many trucks that are coming to Michigan farms could easily be travelling East and West via I-80 where HPAI could easily found. There are also large trucks that carry birds from place to

place and could have been on a farm that could be infected. Lastly, many Michigan producers are going over their facility at a regularly interval with disinfectant sprayed onto the ground as a last line of defense if some amount of the virus has slipped through the cracks.

Michigan's partnership to protect the states birds

In addition to biosecurity changes, all of Michigan's poultry producers rallied together to protect the state's birds. Michigan Allied Poultry Industries (MAPI) acts as the state trade association. Early on in the HPAI outbreaks, MAPI was responsible for coordinating conference calls to discuss best practices and issues in biosecurity, coordinate efforts of producers to help learn from past HPAI outbreaks, and talked directly with producers to help them get to a satisfactory level of biosecurity.

Starting April 17th, Michigan implemented a weekly call that includes many of the Michigan poultry stakeholders including allied industries such as feed companies. This includes Michigan State University's (MSU) Extension staff, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and rural Development (MDARD), Michigan's State Veterinarians, and MAPI board and membership representative. As recently as June 30th, there was a call with the MAPI membership and Michigan Department of Natural Resources officials to discuss further migratory bird testing and the Canada geese found on the East side of Michigan that were infected with HPAI. More specifically, MSU has always made itself available to discuss biosecurity risk analysis, strategies, and implementation. For example, MSU's Extension program has presented at MAPI's annual winter seminar on biosecurity on multiple occasions. Another example is Dr. Richard (Mick) Fulton of MSU Extension wrote the state's Low Pathogen Avian Influenza (LPAI) program that is now handled by MDARD. This exemplifies both MSU's expertise in poultry and ability to partner with other state offices. Additionally, when asked to provide this testimony, Dr. Fulton was one of the first people I asked for counsel.

Next, MAPI penned a letter to the Director of MDARD on May 21, 2015 asking the state to halt all "live poultry sales at farmer's markets, poultry show, fairs, and exhibitions" as well as asking the State Veterinarian to "stop movement of backyard and hobby poultry by suspending poultry classes at county fair and exhibitions until it is determined that the threat of HPAI in the US no longer exists." This was based on the rapid spread of the disease, the discussions that ensued and building on what we saw happening in the industry. Pennsylvania, a victim of an avian influenza outbreak in the early 80's, was one of the first to make this request of their state and Pennsylvania had not yet experience an outbreak in 2015. MDARD Director Jamie Clover Adams, in Michigan, granted MAPI's request two weeks later.

Finally, the industry is policing itself on many of these issues. The financial investment on many of these changes can be very high. New buildings, truck washing, and time add up for a producer to protect the birds. What can be assumed is that a region is only as strong as its weakest link. West Michigan is where the vast majority of the poultry production lives and an outbreak at one of those farms could be devastating to other area farms, even with the strictest biosecurity program. What this means is that producers are talking with each other or through MAPI regarding major breaches of biosecurity that are witnessed. As with any new programs, gaps were identified in all producer programs at the beginning, however, since the commencement of the increased emphasis on biosecurity, there have been little

complaints. There is a cohesive thought process amongst producers to do everything possible to protect the state's birds.

Synopsis

An overall feeling of constant vigilance resonates throughout Michigan amongst producers. As recently as the end of June, producers were encouraged to keep an intense focus on biosecurity through the fall migration in 2015. In addition to the constant vigilance, an effort to document, verify and validate all procedures will ensure a permanent focus on biosecurity. Many of these items discussed here will become common practice. The most impactful way the HPAI changed producer attitudes is to consider areas that were never considered before as potential breaches of biosecurity.

Other changes that have been implemented at other Michigan farms

Included below is a bulleted list of other items producers in Michigan have implemented or changed to mitigate the risk of HPAI coming onto their farms. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but meant to illustrate the lessons learned from this horrific disaster:

- Disinfectant spray over part of all of the farm's high traffic areas with commercial sprayers.
- All unnecessary visitors are prohibited until further notice.
- Dramatic increase in liquid or slurry footbaths of disinfectant through the farm for foot traffic. Large mats that can disinfect the entire radius of semi-tractor and trailer have been placed at the entrances to farms as well.
- Increased signage, gates, and other tools to restrict access near live poultry.
- Not allowing any drivers to get out of their trucks to traverse farms.
- In the event a visitor is allowed on a farm, "Port-a-Jons" are in areas so that those visitors do not need to go inside any company owned facilities.
- Lysol is being supplied to all company owned truck drivers to spray their shoes and inside of truck cabs.
- Cleaning and disinfectant fogging of all materials that were at other poultry facilities.
- Disallowing any supplies from farms in areas where HPAI has been detected.
- Purchases of gates or heavy duty chains for all entrances to farm.

Michigan producers practiced biosecurity for years prior to this HPAI outbreak and it is very common to increase intensity in times when there is an immediate threat. Michigan poultry producers are very concerned about HPAI and are trying to do all that they are able to prevent it from infecting our flocks. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Stabenow, and all members of the committee, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

