

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senator Harkin. My name is Gretta Irwin, and I have served for the last 11 years as executive director of the Iowa Turkey Federation. I am testifying today on behalf of the National Turkey Federation, and we appreciate the opportunity to be here.

Iowa has a robust turkey industry. We are the nation's 10th-largest turkey producing state in the nation, raising about nine million turkeys on family farms, and Iowa ranks fifth in turkey processing. The West Liberty Foods processing plant in West Liberty, Iowa, and the Sara Lee Foods facility in Storm Lake, Iowa, process about 18 million turkeys between them. Turkey production in our state has increased 17 percent in the last five years alone. Nationally, the turkey industry will raise almost 270 million turkeys this year and produce more than five billion pounds of turkey meat.

Turkey producers and processors in Iowa and across the United States have been fighting avian influenza (AI) long before it started making headlines. For our industry, avian influenza poses a triple threat: it threatens the health of the turkeys we raise; it threatens the economic livelihood of processors and the family farmers who grow birds for them; and it threatens to create a negative public health perception about our products.

Fortunately, I am here today bearing good news. The U.S. turkey industry has been extraordinarily successful in the fight against avian influenza. The one fact that must be underscored at this hearing is that there has never been a single case in the United States of the Asian-type of avian influenza. We believe Iowa has played a role in this success story by developing a model program of industry/government cooperation to control the disease and prevent significant outbreaks. I had the privilege of being involved in the development of our Emergency Poultry Disease Plan, and it contains the following critical components:

? Since September 2003, the State of Iowa has required that every turkey and chicken flock in the state be tested for avian influenza.

? The state has a trained poultry pathologist with more than 25 years' experience, Dr. Darrell Trampel, at the Iowa State University Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory to handle any poultry case that might arise. The Iowa State laboratory also has available a real-time test that will detect the two most serious strains of AI - H5 and H7 - within three to four hours.

? Any positive samples are sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames for specific typing. If a positive H5 or H7 is found, the farm is quarantined by the state for a minimum of three months after the last positive sample is found.

? Procedures for disposal of the manure, cleaning the barn, delivery of feed, rescheduling the replacement flocks and a pest control program are all outlined in the program.

? County emergency management officers in the state currently are in the process of developing local plans for handling any infectious animal disease emergencies.

? Our State Veterinarian, Dr. John Schiltz, has created an Iowa Veterinary Rapid Response Team that has more than 280 members in place to assist him should the need arise. In addition, the State of Iowa employs additional full-time veterinarians strategically located around the state to handle poultry and livestock disease issues.

This is a plan that is constantly being reviewed and updated as needed. The most recent revision of the plan was made in August 2005.

Most importantly, Iowa is not alone in preparing for this emergency. Our plan is modeled from the Minnesota AI plan, and similar programs have been designed by industry and government in every turkey producing region of the country. In addition, Congress and USDA recently have joined forces to create what we hope will be a strong federal control program as well.

These efforts have combined not only to keep the lethal Asian strain of AI out of the United States, but it actually has been more than 20 years since there has been a significant outbreak of any strain of Highly Pathogenic AI in this country.

Programs like ours in Iowa have helped build this track record, but several other critical factors are at work as well:

First, the modern production techniques used in the commercial turkey, chicken and egg industries place a premium on biosecurity. As any of you have visited a poultry farm know, there are strict controls as to who can come onto a farm where poultry is being raised, and protective clothing is mandatory for anyone entering a poultry house. Contrast this to the situation in the Asian nations where lethal outbreaks have been reported. In those countries, most poultry is raised in "backyard flocks," and people and their birds co-exist in close quarters. No biosecurity system is in place, access to these areas is not controlled and no protective clothing is worn. I have attached to my written statement an article from Monday's USA Today that provides excellent background on standard poultry production practices.

Second, the vertically integrated model used in the turkey industry gives us a unique advantage in responding to and containing any type of disease outbreak. Turkey companies and their veterinarians monitor flocks on a constant basis, tracking their movement from the hatchery all the way through to the processing plant. Growers, veterinarians and processors respond immediately at the first sign of any disease in a flock, taking care to cure the disease where possible and to ensure that the disease does not spread to other flocks in the area.

Finally, as I noted earlier, special protocols are in place to detect and control any form of AI. The U.S. industry will know immediately if any form of AI appears, and it has an array of tools available - including euthanizing a flock if necessary - to prevent the spread of the disease.

Interestingly, we can measure our success in part by following Congress' own appropriations process. Last year, USDA began the process of implementing the first national program to control Low Pathogenic AI. The rationale behind the program is that if Low Path AI, which is not harmful to humans, is properly controlled then our chances of a Low Path strain mutating into a lethal strain of AI is dramatically reduced. Congress gave USDA \$23 million for the program in Fiscal Year 2005, and \$12 million of it was set aside to indemnify growers whose flocks had to be destroyed because of a Low Path AI outbreak. Not one penny of that \$12 million had to be used in FY 2005, which is a sign that the industry and state programs, along with the emerging federal effort, are all working.

This success gives the turkey industry confidence, but it does not make us cocky. As recently as 2002, there was a significant outbreak of Low Path AI in Virginia. Nearly four million turkeys and chickens had to be destroyed, and the episode cost that state's poultry industry more than \$150 million. Because it was not a strain that is harmful to humans, the headlines

were confined to the local newspapers; most Americans were not even aware there was a problem. But, that incident led all of us in the industry to review and further enhance our control programs, and it was the event that convinced the federal government to move forward with a long-term control program.

The Virginia incident also served to underscore the unique challenge posed by Live Bird Markets. These markets exist in almost every major urban area of the United States and serve those customers who prefer to purchase their poultry live and dress the birds themselves at home. Until recently, these markets have operated with a minimum of government supervision and have been reservoirs of Low Path AI. The Virginia outbreak and almost every other incident of Low Path AI can be traced back to the Live Bird Markets. Birds that are sold in these markets are raised in the same areas as commercial poultry, and these growers often return from the markets - traveling through regions with heavy commercial production - having been exposed to Low Path AI.

One of the most critical components of the new USDA program is its increased surveillance of the Live Bird Markets. The USDA program calls for periodically closing and cleaning the markets, and funds are available to compensate the market owners for their downtime. Some might argue that these markets should be closed entirely, but those of us who work in the commercial industry would strongly disagree. We live in a diverse, multicultural nation, and there always will be a demand for live birds. If we were to close the markets, we simply would drive them underground. We will be far more effective in combating AI if we make Live Bird Markets our partners in this effort, and USDA's program is helping us do that. There is more, of course, that can be done, and we have three specific recommendations for this Committee:

? Work closely with your colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to continue funding USDA's long-term Low Path AI control program at the maximum level necessary. We are pleased Congress provided additional funds for the program in Fiscal Year 2006, and we would urge you to continue doing so as needed in the future.

? In the rush to enhance our ability to protect the human population from a possible pandemic, do not forget that prevention begins on the farm. While we commend President Bush for calling on Congress to provide \$7.1 billion in emergency funding, we were dismayed that less than \$100 million was targeted for USDA. The Agricultural Research Service includes some of the world's foremost experts on avian influenza, and Congress should make sure their programs are fully funded and that their facilities are modern, up-to-date and able to conduct the most sensitive research.

? Finally, the United States should take the lead in uniting the world in fighting avian influenza in poultry. Too often, AI has become a tool in trade battles, and this distracts from efforts to control the disease globally. USDA did a very good job in working for revisions to the Organization for International Epizootics (OIE) guidelines on Low Path AI. Those guidelines now state that a country is obliged to report AI only if an H5 or H7 strain of the disease has appeared, as these are the only strains that have the potential to mutate into a deadly form of the disease. Countries like the United States that are successfully controlling H5 and H7 should be rewarded for their efforts, not forced to report harmless strains and punished with embargoes

when these non-threatening strains appear.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.