

## **Avian Influenza Talking Points**

5/8/2006

### **1. We expect high path H5N1 to arrive in the U.S. While it's possible that it will not reach our borders, we are preparing as if it will.**

- a. This expectation relates to the rapid spread of the virus overseas and the start of spring migration – with the potential for wild birds to mix in the flyways.

### **2. The arrival of high path avian influenza would NOT signal the start of a human flu pandemic.**

- a. There is no evidence that the virus is passed easily from human to human anywhere in the world.
- b. Almost all of the human illnesses and deaths in other countries have been attributed to direct contact with infected birds

### **3. Properly prepared poultry is safe to eat.**

- a. Even if high path H5N1 reaches the U.S., it is unlikely an infected bird would enter our food supply
- b. Proper cooking kills the avian influenza virus, just as it does many other germs.

### **4. We have experience responding to high path avian influenza – we've done so three times in the United States.**

- a. Most recent – 2004, confined to one flock

### **5. We are expanding wild bird testing as an early warning system.**

- a. We are working with the Department of the Interior, states, and universities to finalize a plan to increase testing as spring migration begins.
- b. Wild birds move along predictable pathways during migration and many birds that nest in Alaska spend winters in parts of Asia where the high path H5N1 virus is endemic.
- c. This early detection plan prioritizes testing in Alaska, elsewhere in the Pacific flyway, and the Pacific Islands. This will be followed by the Central, Mississippi and Atlantic flyways.
- d. The plan uses a combination of five strategies to achieve early detection. They are:

1. Testing wild birds that have died or are sick
    - a. This offers the highest and earliest probability of detecting the high path H5N1, if it is introduced in the U.S. by a wild bird
  2. Sample testing of live wild birds
  3. Sample testing of hunter-killed birds
  4. Monitoring and testing of sentinel species
  5. Testing of environmental samples
- e. The plan calls for a combined testing of 75,000 – 100,000 live and dead birds (DOI, USDA, and states combined) in 2006 and conducting 50,000 habitat samples (feces and water)
- f. The plan also establishes a systematic approach to the collection and tracking of sample data

**6. Detection in wild birds would NOT mean high path AI will reach commercial poultry because the U.S. poultry industry is very sophisticated.**

- a. Biosecurity practices are part of daily operations at commercial poultry farms (“biosecurity” practices are sanitary practices that provide protection)
  - i. Commercial poultry are typically raised in covered buildings – offering limited exposure to wild birds
  - ii. Most commercial operations control access to and from those buildings and require workers to follow sanitary procedures as they come and go
- b. The U.S. commercial poultry industry is highly consolidated – meaning we have many birds in close, confined locations – so it would be easier to wipe-out the virus

**7. We have a detailed response plan in place and the ability to quickly dispatch a team to the scene of an outbreak.**

- a. We have 600 USDA veterinarians and 385 animal health technicians. In addition, there are 400 state veterinarians and 250 state animal health technicians who work cooperatively with USDA on animal health issues.
- b. We have the ability to tap into a network of 1,300 state and local veterinarians and animal health technicians if needed (called National Animal Health Emergency Reserve Corps.)

## ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Monitoring Domestic Flocks:** We work with state and industry partners to monitor and test domestic flocks, including those at live bird markets and commercial poultry operations
  - Also - “Biosecurity for the Birds” program for backyard flock owners
    - This program teaches backyard flock owners about important biosecurity - *or sanitary* - practices and how to identify and report signs of illness in birds
    - Approx 50,000 backyard flocks in U.S. (2003 figure)
  
- **Border Control:** We have several protections in place at our borders.
  - USDA quarantines and tests all live birds imported from countries other than Canada, except returning U.S.-origin pet birds that are tested and allowed to go through home quarantine.
    - We have three secure quarantine facilities where birds are held for 30 days and tested for AI.
  
  - USDA prohibits imports of poultry raised or slaughtered in countries where high path H5N1 has been detected in commercial poultry or traditionally raised poultry, not in wild or migratory birds.
    - Feathers: the importation of commercial shipments of raw bulk feathers from highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza (HPAI) affected countries must comply with USDA regulations to prevent the introduction and dissemination of HPAI H5N1 into the United States. These shipments are required to have a certificate of processing according to USDA regulations and an import permit.
    - Note: USDA regulations address importation of poultry and poultry products. We do not have the authority on labeling fully finished commodities containing feathers such as comforters, pillows, jackets, etc.
  
  - USDA has a smuggling interdiction team that works closely with the Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection to prevent illegal smuggling of birds and poultry products
  
- **International Assistance:** We are expanding our assistance to countries affected by high path H5N1 - knowing that anything we can do to contain the virus overseas, will help to protect both animal and human health in the U.S.
  - We have sent teams of experts to educate, conduct research, and assist other countries with monitoring and eradication efforts.

- We are preparing to work as part of an international team to conduct country by country assessments of their needs in relation to AI
- **Response Plan details:** In the event of an outbreak, we are prepared to take five main steps:
  - Quarantine the affected poultry operation(s)
  - Secure the area and limit movement
  - Increase AI testing throughout region to quickly detect any spread
  - Humanely destroy the infected birds
  - Sanitize the area and maintain quarantine until tests confirm the area is AI-free
- **Vaccines:** Additionally, USDA maintains a bank of bird vaccines to protect healthy birds outside a control area, if necessary.
  - The vaccine would be used to create a firewall around a quarantine to prevent spread
  - 40 million doses
    - (20 million for H7 and 20 million for H5 – proven effective against highly pathogenic H5N1 AI)
    - (specifically - 10 M H5N2; 10 M H5N9; 10 M H7N2; 10 M H7N3)
  - Another 70 million doses in development
- **Lab Capabilities:** We have a network of 39 USDA-certified federal, state and university laboratories capable of conducting AI tests (part of National Animal Health Laboratory Network)
  - The combined capacity is 18,000 tests per day (500 tests per day per lab)
  - During the exotic Newcastle outbreak, a single lab in the network could run 80,000 tests in one day. Spread among 39 labs, the 75,000-100,000 live and dead bird samples and 50,000 water and feces samples would not a huge increase in testing during a one year period.
  - USDA operates premiere lab in Ames, Iowa (National Veterinary Services Laboratory) where confirmatory testing is conducted
- **Funding:** Thanks to the President's leadership in identifying this as a priority, and our ability to access animal health emergency funds, we have the resources needed to prepare and respond.
  - In 2006, USDA received \$91 million in supplemental funding to fight A-I here at home and overseas
  - In addition, our 2007 budget includes \$82 million in appropriated funds to address AI