HPAI is Hanging On

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), commonly known as Bird Flu, is a highly contagious and deadly viral disease that predominantly impacts birds, specifically domestic poultry like chickens and turkeys. It is caused by a virulent subtype of the Influenza type-A virus, resulting in rapid spread and significant mortality within affected poultry flocks. While this virus causes severe illness and high mortality in domestic poultry, it is naturally present in various wild aquatic birds, including ducks, geese, swans, and shorebirds.

The influenza viruses of primary concern in poultry industry are of high pathogenic subtypes as they cause significant economic damage and distress to the commercial as well as backyard poultry producers. H5 and H7 subtypes of avian influenza virus are known to cause HPAI with few variations in “N” proteins. H5N1, H5N2, H5N8, H7N9 and H7N8 are the major HPAI subtypes which have caused significant Bird flu outbreak in the United States. HPAI is a notifiable disease, and all outbreaks must be notified to the World Organization of Animal Health (WOAH) by the authorities.

Poultry growers should possess knowledge about the symptoms associated with deadly poultry diseases like HPAI. Being familiar with these signs enables them to identify any abnormalities or issues promptly. Early detection plays a crucial role in preventing the transmission of diseases. Be vigilant and watch out for the following indications:

Sudden Spike in Mortality

HPAI is a highly fatal disease of poultry, especially chickens and can cause significant increase in bird deaths. If there is a sudden spike in mortality without any obvious signs, it could be indicative of HPAI.

Respiratory Distress

Infected birds may display coughing, sneezing, wheezing, gasping, along with nasal discharge.

Reduction in Appetite and Productivity

Reduced feed and water intake, weight loss, and sharp drop in egg production.

Swelling and Discolorations

In a HPAI infected poultry, there is swelling and cyanosis of head, comb, and wattles.

Birds may also exhibit a staggering gait as a result of HPAI exposure. The virus, much like the flu in people affects the elderly population more so than the young and strong. This is why bird flu has affected eggs prices much more than poultry meat prices.

Layers are older birds, and they tend to be more susceptible to the flu and are much more likely to suffer mortality as a result. The largest contributory factor is the flock’s location as compared the migratory bird flight paths.

Interestingly, our region is surrounded by the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways but not directly impacted by either. Let’s hope that our luck holds because Virginia’s largest egg producing county is Washington County. That ranking is a result of only one farm so again, let us hope our luck holds!

Upcoming Events

Feb 24 BQA Training for Beef Grant Applicants, Extension Office 6:30 PM

March 3 Smyth Washington Cattleman Meeting, 6:30 PM, 4-H Center, Topic Mineral Nutrition

March 11 Washington County Chamber of Commerce Ag Day, SWVA Higher Ed Center 7 PM

March 18 VQA Calf Sale

Mar 20 Farm Toy Show Set Up, SWVA Higher Ed Center, 8 AM-5PM

March 21 National Ag Day

March 21-22 First Annual Farm Toy Show, Friday Noon to 8 PM and Saturday, 8 AM to 3 PM

March 22 SW BCIA Bull Test Sale, Wytheville

March 24 VQA Steer Take-up

March 26 VQA Heifer Take-Up

April 1 AFCA Bull Sale

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at (276) 783-5175/TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.

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