APHIS Updates Policy to Enhance Surveillance of Turkey Flocks in Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza Affected States

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Press Release

Media Contact:
aphispress@usda.gov

WASHINGTON, January 17, 2025—As part of its ongoing, multi-faceted efforts to combat the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today is updating its policy for pre-slaughter surveillance to enhance testing of turkey flocks in affected states. In late December 2024, APHIS became aware of a genetic link between turkeys potentially infected with HPAI H5N1, virus detected in raw pet food, and an infected household cat.

Out of an abundance of caution, and to remove a potential avenue for ongoing disease spread as well as to bolster consumer and trading partner confidence, APHIS collaborated with state animal health officials and the poultry industry to update its guidance for existing pre-slaughter surveillance steps to further ensure that affected poultry does not enter the food system. APHIS will continue to report confirmed HPAI detections to the World Organisation for Animal Health and on the APHIS website (more information below).

These updates include implementing isolation with clinical monitoring and premovement testing 72 hours prior to sending to slaughter, for turkey premises outside control areas in HPAI-affected states. Specifically, APHIS will be piloting this enhanced pre-slaughter surveillance, starting with turkey premises greater than 500 birds in Minnesota and South Dakota, based on current and historical HPAI detections of commercial turkey premises in these states. These states were selected because of genetic linkages to virus from infected cats and because of the high percentage of cases in turkeys in those states. APHIS will continue to evaluate progress of the outbreak and may update this policy, if needed, to include additional states.

USDA consistently operates on a science-based, step-by-step approach, informed by what it learns about this virus through its everyday work and research and surveillance efforts. APHIS will continue to update its guidance for pre-slaughter surveillance schemes as USDA continues to follow the science on HPAI.

In May 2024, USDA announced the transfer of $824 million from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to APHIS to directly support H5N1 response efforts. This funding supports anticipated diagnostics; field response activities; pre-movement testing requirements; other necessary surveillance and control activities, including

surveillance in wildlife; the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) work in developing vaccines for HPAI in cattle, turkeys, pigs, and goats; and food safety studies carried out by ARS and the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

USDA remains confident in the safety of the food supply. FSIS, APHIS, and ARS have completed multiple studies to confirm that poultry and eggs that are properly prepared and cooked are safe to eat. Additionally, to verify the safety of the meat supply, these agencies have completed three separate beef safety studies related to avian influenza in meat from dairy cattle.

APHIS continues to work closely with state animal health officials on surveillance efforts to look for the virus in commercial, backyard, and wild birds. We also continue to encourage all bird owners to practice strong biosecurity—that means reducing opportunities for wildlife to spread the virus to their birds and preventing the spread of the virus from one premises to another. APHIS will continue to publicly post poultry detections on its dashboard. USDA also makes genetic sequences from the U.S. H5N1 clade 2.3.4.4b influenza virus available on GISAID (the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data) and the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) Sequence Read Archive (use search term "WGS of H5N1").