



USDA: Rural Business Apps. Wanted

WASHINGTON — Agriculture Under Secretary Lisa Mensah has announced that USDA is seeking applications for grants to support rural businesses and help create jobs.

“This USDA funding will ensure continued investments in rural businesses,” Mensah said. “Too often, rural businesses and the communities they serve lack access to the capital and resources they need to grow and thrive. These grants will help remedy that and allow all Americans the chance to share in the nation’s economic recovery.”

More than \$28 million is expected to be available under the Rural Business Development Grant (RBDG) program. Eligible applicants include public bodies, government entities, Indian tribes and non-profit organizations.

Congress established the RBDG program under the 2014 Farm Bill by combining USDA’s Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBE) and Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) programs. The new program, like its predecessors, is designed to assist the startup or expansion of small and emerging private businesses and/or non-profits in rural communities.

RBDG grants can be used to acquire or develop land, buildings, plants and equipment; build or improve access roads, parking areas, utility extensions, and water and waste disposal facilities; provide technical assistance; establish revolving loan funds; and to support rural distance learning programs that provide educational or job training. There are no substantive programmatic or operational changes to the RBE and RBOG programs as a result of this consolidation.

Grants made before the implementation of the RBDG program will continue to be governed by the terms of the applicable RBOG and RBE regulations in effect at the time the grants were made.

For additional information on how to apply, contact the South Dakota Rural Development State Office at (605) 352-1142 or see Page 15665 of the March 25 Federal Register/.

Eminent Farmer/Rancher Noms Sought

BROOKINGS — The Eminent Farmer/Rancher and Homemaker Committee seeks nominations for the 2015 South Dakota State University Eminent Farmer/Rancher and Homemaker Award Program.

This year marks the 88th anniversary of the program which was founded in 1927. The intent of this program is to recognize citizens for a lifetime of leadership and service.

The nominees should have made significant contributions to their community, state and SDSU, and should be known for giving unselfishly of their talent, time and leadership. There is no age requirement, but the nominees must be living at the time honorees are notified. Nominations are confidential therefore nominees are not to be interviewed.

Husband and wife combinations may be nominated, but a separate nomination form is needed for each individual. If nominees were previously employed by SDSU, employment cannot have been within the last five years. Up to five letters of reference are also invited.

HOW TO NOMINATE

Official Eminent Farmer/Rancher and Homemaker brochures detailing the selection process and criteria and official nomination forms are available online at sdstate.edu/abs/honors/eminent. These forms are the basis for the selection process. To request a hard copy of the brochure and nomination form, contact Angela Loftness at 605-688-6732 or angela.loftness@sdstate.edu.

All nominations must be received by June 1, 2015. Send nominations to: EFRH Nominations; ATTN: Angela Loftness, Dean’s Office, ABS College SDSU, Box 2207, Brookings, SD 57007. Or, they can be e-mailed to angela.loftness@sdstate.edu.

The awards will be presented at SDSU on Sept. 18, 2015, by the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences and the College of Education and Human Sciences.

If you have questions, contact Angela Loftness at 605-688-6732.

HP Avian Influenza In SD: Questions And Answers

BROOKINGS — This week, the South Dakota State University Animal Disease Research and Diagnostic Laboratory detected highly pathogenic avian influenza virus in samples submitted from a turkey farm in Beadle County.

Higher than normal death loss in one of four barns on the premises prompted the caretakers to seek diagnostic assistance, explained Dr. Russ Daly, SDSU Extension Veterinarian, State Public Health Veterinarian & SDSU Associate Professor.

“Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreaks have occurred throughout the U.S. this spring, affecting small backyard poultry flocks, as well as large commercial barns,” Daly said.

He explained that these outbreaks occurred along three different migratory bird flyways (Pacific, Central and Mississippi). The South Dakota occurrence is the second to be identified in the Central flyway.

“Influenza viruses are encountered every year by people and a variety of animals,” Daly said. “For the most part, these ‘flu’ viruses stick to one species: human influenza viruses spread among people, avian influenza viruses (such as these particular HPAI viruses) spread among birds, and so on. Occasionally, influenza viruses normally found in one species will infect other species. For example, certain swine influenza viruses have occasionally infected people, and certain avian influenza viruses, notably the H5N1 virus in Asia, occasionally infect people as well.”

Below, Daly responds to frequently asked questions in regards to the Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus.

Q: What is happening with the affected farm?

A: State and federal animal health officials are responding to the outbreak according to long-standing protocols. Infected farms are placed under quarantine, meaning that no birds can leave or enter the farm. Remaining live birds are humanely euthanized and disposed of on the premise. The building and grounds are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and sit idle for a period of time.

Q: How will this outbreak affect neighboring farms?

A: State and federal response plans establish a 10 kilometer (approximately 6 miles) “control” zone, as well as a 20 kilometer “surveillance” zone around the infected farm. All poultry flocks in the control zone will be sampled by animal health officials and tested for avian influenza. All poultry flocks in



PHOTO: METRO GRAPHICS

the surveillance zone will be contacted by animal health officials to determine if any signs of illness or unexpected death losses have been noticed.

Q: What does this avian influenza virus do to these birds?

A: That this virus is termed “highly pathogenic” is no mistake. These strains affect birds so quickly that clinical signs are usually not noticed. The first signs noticed by flock owners are an unexpected number of dead birds. Weakness, difficulty breathing, and purple swelling of the comb and wattles are signs that may be observed prior to death.

Q: How do these domestic birds get infected by HPAI?

A: Birds infected with influenza discharge the virus through their droppings or nasal/respiratory fluids. Susceptible birds ingest or inhale the virus when they encounter those fluids. Most experts assume that the source of these HPAI viruses is migratory waterfowl traveling through the areas.

It’s relatively easy to picture how a free-roaming backyard poultry flock could come in contact with migratory geese and ducks. However, modern poultry production features tight, environmentally controlled barns that typically exclude outside birds and limit human traffic as well. Wild birds congregating around air inlets, or people walking through areas that wild birds have frequented and then entering poultry barns are potential routes of transmission. Sampling of wild birds in the vicinity of outbreaks has not demonstrated a clear source or transmission route for these infections.

Q: How is this HPAI virus similar to other HPAI viruses found across the world?

A: Molecular analysis of

the US HPAI H5N2 viruses shows that they are a combination of Asian HPAI viruses with low-pathogenic North American viruses. The HPAI type that has affected the South Dakota flock is an H5N2 type that carries the “H” antigen from highly-pathogenic Asian strains and the “N” from common low-pathogenic North American viruses.

Q: What bird species have been most commonly affected with HPAI H5N2?

A: Of domestic birds, turkeys have been most commonly affected by these outbreaks across the US, but chickens and a variety of backyard birds have also been identified.

No wild bird infections have been detected yet in South Dakota, but in other states, the virus has most often been associated with ducks and geese. Birds of prey such as hawks, falcons, and eagles are also affected, presumably from eating infected waterfowl. While many sources mention pheasants as susceptible to HPAI, no pheasant death losses have been detected in South Dakota; however, a backyard pheasant flock in Washington State was identified as infected in January.

Q: What is the danger for people working with the affected birds?

A: There is no indication that these HPAI H5N2 avian strains affect people (or other animals). In each outbreak, agriculture officials work closely with state health departments to identify and monitor people who have been in close contact with infected birds. Typically, exposed people are offered preventative antiviral medications and are contacted each day for 10 days to ensure that they are not suffering flu-like symptoms. In other states, non-specific illnesses in some of these people have prompted further testing, but

no influenza viruses have been found in any of these individuals to date.

Q: Are there food safety problems associated with these HPAI outbreaks?

A: No. Affected birds do not enter the food supply. Furthermore, all influenza viruses are easily inactivated by proper cooking techniques.

Q: How can I protect my backyard flock from infection with these viruses?

A: Owners of backyard free-roaming birds should consider their proximity to places where waterfowl might congregate. If domestic birds can come into contact with waterfowl like ducks and geese, it might be prudent to confine the birds inside. Basic biosecurity protocols such as limiting visitors and vehicle traffic, and cleaning and disinfecting equipment used around other flocks, have increased in importance.

Q: How can I protect my commercial poultry flock?

A: Flock owners should pay close attention to barn security in terms of excluding wild birds and limiting human traffic into poultry barns. Anyone entering barns should adhere to strict policies regarding changing clothes and boots prior to entry. Vehicle and foot traffic should be closely controlled, as tires, boots or clothing that have had contact with wild bird areas are a potential route of entry for a HPAI virus into a barn.

Q: Who should I contact if I suspect HPAI?

A: If you notice unexplained death loss in your birds, contact your veterinarian or the South Dakota Animal Industry Board at 605-773-3321 as soon as possible.

For more information, contact Dr. Daly at russell.daly@sdstate.edu, or the South Dakota Animal Industry Board at 605-773-3321.

BOLD Nebraska Group Targets Fracking Wastewater

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

The controversy surrounding the Keystone XL may have made BOLD Nebraska a household name here in the state, but there is a lot more to this grassroots activist group than its stance against TransCanada’s claim to eminent domain.

BOLD Nebraska was formed in 2010 by Jane Kleeb, a former MTV journalist and farmer from Ayr, Nebraska, in response to the Keystone XL Pipeline and has since grown to cover other issues with the potential to affect landowner rights, such as the latest news of an out-of-state oil company applying to export its fracking wastewater for disposal in Nebraska.

On March 24, the Nebraska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission in Sidney, Neb., held a hearing on an application from Terex Energy of Broomfield, Colo., to haul an estimated 10,000 barrels of wastewater per day - approximately 80 tanker truckloads - from oil and gas production in Colorado and Wyoming across state lines to be disposed in the Spotted Tail Creek Field, a former oil well on a ranch in Sioux County in the Panhandle of Nebraska.

“The well would be by far the largest of its kind in Nebraska, dwarfing any of the other existing injection wells in the state,” according to BOLD Nebraska’s petition calling for signatures against approving Terex’s application. “Wastewater from the fracking process would be pumped down directly through the Ogallala Aquifer, posing a perilous danger to the pre-

vious underground water source that provides drinking water for millions of people and 30 percent of irrigation for our agricultural economy.”

According to the Terex application, the proposed disposal site is in the vicinity of the Ogallala Aquifer, although there are no known faults that would allow contact between the proposed wastewater site and the aquifer.

The hearing was well attended by the public, most of whom were opposed to approval of the application. A video of the testimony of James Osborn of Ainsworth, Neb., went viral on the Internet showing him pouring three glasses of water for the commissioners before then pouring a brown, liquid concoction he claimed was fracking wastewater into each cup, and then offering it to the commissioners.

Osborn identified himself as someone who works in the fracking field.

“Everything about Nebraska runs on water,” he testified. “There is no doubt that there will be contamination. There will be spills.”

Fracking, more formally known as hydraulic fracturing, is the process of injecting large amounts of water, mixed with sand and chemicals, underground to crack shale rock to release pockets of oil and natural gas. After the process, the water mixture used needs to be disposed of. Approximately 10 gallons of wastewater is created for every 1 gallon of oil extracted.

Because fracking wastewater is difficult to treat, it is typically

stored in pits or underground. However, even treated fracking wastewater has been found to still contain chemicals that are harmful to human health and therefore is handled in the similar precaution as radioactive waste, leading to several states banning fracking

“Everything about Nebraska runs on water. There is no doubt that there will be contamination. There will be spills.”

JAMES OSBORN

wastewater disposal. According to BOLD Nebraska, fracking wastewater is often radioactive in itself.

“What’s worse, when it spills, wastewater is particularly damaging to agricultural land, where the effects can last decades or even generations,” continued BOLD Nebraska’s petition. “The outline of a New Mexico wastewater spill from the early 1980s is still visible on Google Earth satellite photos.”

BOLD Nebraska named various cases, including in North Dakota and California, where spills of fracking wastewater have occurred, with devastating results. In fact, the California spill contaminated underground aquifers used for drinking water with nearly 3 billion gallons of wastewater.

“In Nebraska, if the well casing were to fail on Terex’s proposed injection well, it would be impossible to clean up a toxic wastewater spill inside the Ogallala Aquifer,” continued BOLD Nebraska’s petition. “Nebraska has almost no standards to regulate disposal of fracking waste, which is the reason out of state

corporations want to dump their wastewater in our state.”

The primary public concern heard at the Commission meeting was of potential groundwater contamination. A secondary concern was increased traffic from trucking the wastewater to the disposal site.

More than 100 people were prepared to testify in opposition to the application at the hearing, although only half spoke to the commissioners due to available space in the meeting room.

However, according to the Commission, Nebraska already has 130 wastewater disposal wells, including several currently in use for fracking projects in Wyoming. The Commission has not heard any reports of current wastewater disposal sites contaminating drinking water. In addition, per the Commission, the disposal well named in Terex’s application is deemed as an excellent candidate, because it is relatively new and has four layers of concrete protection to guard the environment from possible contamination.

Among the opposition was Sen. John Stinner (District 48) of Scottsbluff, Nebraska, who sent a letter with Sen. Ken Haar (District 21) of Malcolm, Nebraska, to the commissioners in Stinner’s stead. In the letter that Haar read, Stinner urged the commissioners to delay decision on the application until all of the potential environmental impacts have been fully considered.

“This well is located in an environmentally sensitive area in Nebraska,” Stinner’s letter read. “As a

Commission, you have not been presented with a case that involved the great volume of produced water proposed to be injected into the subterranean in Nebraska as will be done by this proposal. It is incumbent upon the Commission to perform due diligence that this application will not have a long-term adverse impact on the precious water supply in Western Nebraska.”

As the letter continued, Stinner mentioned concerns about the Commission’s lack of funding to monitor groundwater safety or to clean up any spills that may occur in the future, and also touched on the potential public safety issues from the increased Terex truck traffic to haul the wastewater, not to mention the estimated \$6.5 million damage to roadways over the long term.

On Jan. 21, Stinner had introduced LB512 to the Nebraska Legislature, which is currently pending in the Natural Resources Committee. The bill would authorize funding to the Commission to monitor and regulate out-of-state wastewater disposal in Nebraska. BOLD Nebraska has sent out a request to its supporters to contact Sen. Ken Schilz (District 47) of Ogallala, Neb., chairman of the Natural Resources Committee, to pause the fracking well permit process until a study can be done on fracking wastewater’s impact on resources.

The Commission didn’t take any immediate action on the application on March 24, but a decision is mandated within 30 days of the hearing date, which can then be appealed by the applicant or interveners if desired.