

# Reducing The Spread

## Poultry Producers Must Examine Methods To Slow Bird Flu

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

Poultry, including backyard chickens both in and out of town, have become popular pets for the young and old – not to mention, a source of extra cash for those enterprising farm-fresh eggs.

But the arrival of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)H5N2 is now threatening this now widespread hobby.

As of the end of May, this particular strain of bird flu has hit locally with one commercial turkey flock in Yankton County, another in Hutchinson County, one commercial egg-laying flock in Knox County, Neb., and another two in Dixon County, Neb., all testing positive for HPAI.

Other South Dakota counties with confirmed outbreaks include Beadle, Kingsbury, McCook, McPherson, Moody, Roberts and Spink — each with commercial turkey flocks. No other Nebraska counties have been affected.

The surrounding states of Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri and Kansas also have confirmed cases of the bird flu as well as Indiana, Arkansas, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and California.

Earlier in May, following similar measures in Minnesota and North Dakota, both South Dakota and Iowa announced orders to cancel all live bird exhibitions: South Dakota's until further notice, and Iowa's through the end of the year. The affected events include county fairs, state fairs and other gatherings, including live bird sales.

"We are asking producers and bird owners to increase their biosecurity measures," said Bill Northey, Iowa's Agriculture Secretary at the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship in Des Moines, Iowa. "We feel this is a needed step to further minimize the risk of spreading the virus. The scale of this outbreak has been unprecedented, so we think it is important we take every possible step to limit the chance that this disease will spread any further."

Perhaps the hardest-hit segment of poultry enthusiasts are 4-H youth who were looking forward to showing their chickens, ducks, geese, turkeys and other birds at the county fair. But Mike Anderson, 4-H livestock superintendent at the Iowa State Fair in Ames, Iowa, said that livestock quality assurance training received by youth includes biosecurity topics, including the potential for diseases to spread, so youth — while disappointed — are prepared in advance for this possibility.

"The education and learning practices are being put into action in the real world," he said, adding that Extension services will be exploring alternate opportunities to offer 4-H poultry exhibitors at their county and state fairs in lieu of exhibition.

And now, as of June 4, Nebraska has also

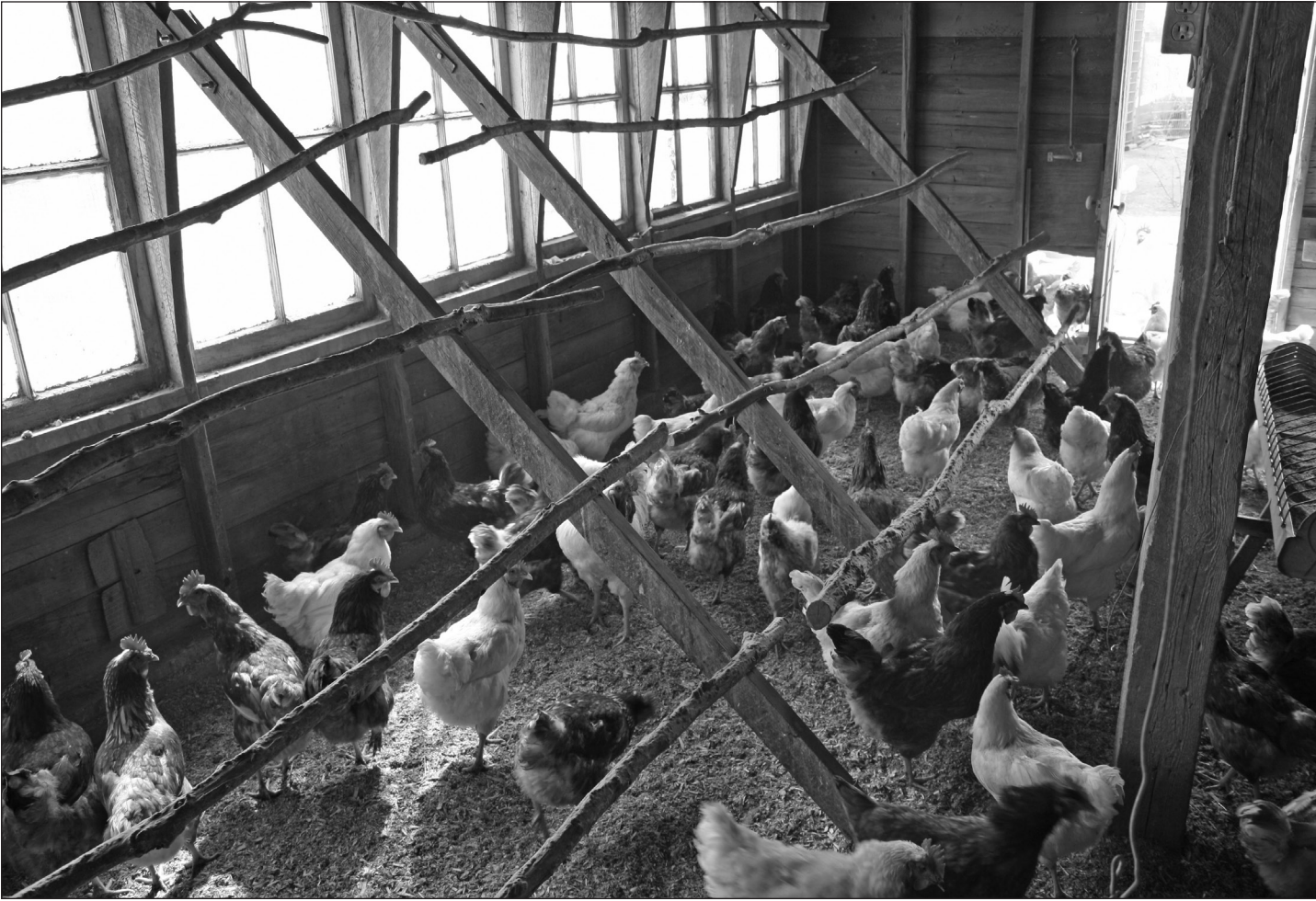


PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

banned live poultry exhibitions, auctions and other events and activities where birds from multiple origins can come together.

According to Nebraska's State Veterinarian Dennis Hughes in Lincoln, Neb., all breeder flocks providing chicks to farm stores and for 4-H projects continue to be clean of this virus. Although this influenza strain is not harmful to humans, it is devastating to bird populations, killing as much as 90 percent of a flock within three days of the initial symptoms.

The remainder of the flocks that test positive for the bird flu are euthanized.

While the primary source of the virus spreading state to state has been migrating waterfowl, it is now believed that the virus is also airborne and spreading between facilities via dust, people's clothing, vehicles and other animals, such as sparrows that have come into contact with infected birds or their manure. The virus can incubate and live in an environment for up to three weeks before the birds become sick.

Although the U.S. Department of Agriculture is working on creating a vaccine for the

HPAI virus, the only way to avoid infection at this point is disinfecting equipment and facilities and preventing contact between poultry and environmental factors that have had contact with migrating waterfowl, including potentially all wild birds.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension and 4-H specialists have been pulsing biosecurity information out to their local backyard poultry flocks and 4-H members. It's strongly suggested that backyard flock owners do not visit their neighbor's flock, live bird auctions or parks with migrating birds.

"It is highly advised that backyard flock owners move their birds into indoor shelters. Simply do not share pasture, space or water with wild birds," said Sheila Purdum, UNL Extension poultry specialist at Lincoln. "This may be hard for some backyard folks, but they are just as susceptible to this nasty virus as the big producers."

While all waterfowl can transmit HPAI, mallards and dabbling ducks are most likely to harbor and shed the virus. The highest level of bird flu virus are shed in manure, which then contaminate the water or soil,

allowing transmission without direct exposure to the infected bird. Small songbirds, like sparrows, are then mostly likely to pick up the virus from areas visited by infected waterfowl and then carry it back to the farm. From there, people and equipment are the major means for introducing the virus from contaminated sparrows into the poultry facility. The virus can also be spread via dust and feathers but only as far as the wind can blow it, though this may not be far if the contaminated dust and feathers are falling off a passing truck.

All in all, it only takes the amount of virus the size of the head of a pin to cause an outbreak in a poultry house. Also, the virus can survive up to a month in manure in below-40-degree temperatures and up to five months in water at 66 degrees.

"We are no doubt clear of the possibility of this virus continuing to spread in Nebraska," Purdum said. "Stringent biosecurity is our best weapon against spread."

**"In general, El Nino means less likelihood of long-term extreme heat events and less likelihood of extended dry conditions in the summer season."**

LAURA EDWARDS

### South Dakota

## May Was Second Wettest On Record Since 1895; SE Corner Still In Drought

BROOKINGS — Moisture during the month of May rapidly transitioned the state out of drought conditions.

"Preliminary data indicate that at least eight climate stations reported their wettest May on record, with more reports yet to come in," said Laura Edwards, SDSU Extension Climate Field Specialist.

The north central and southwest regions were among the wettest areas of the state. The north central region weather stations recorded their second wettest May since 1895 with a regional average of 6.22 inches; the other wettest was recorded in 1906 when the region-wide average was 6.73 inches.

Records were also set at individual weather stations; Mobridge recorded not only its wettest May, but May 2015 is documented in the record books as the wettest month in the location's recorded history with 9.32 inches of precipitation. This exceeds the previous record of 8.85 inches in June 1915.

Edwards added that the southwest region of the state had many climate stations that measured two to three times their average May precipitation. "As a region, the southwest also had its second wettest May on record, with an average of 7.29 inches," Edwards said. She said the wettest May for this region occurred in 1982, with a region-wide average of 7.34 inches.

### TRANSITION OUT OF DROUGHT

Following the driest January through April period on record for South Dakota, the May 5 U.S. Drought Monitor had 78 percent of the state in moderate to severe drought (in D1 and D2 designations.) By May 26, only 9 percent of the state was in drought, focused on the southeastern region.

The May statewide average precipitation was 5.88 inches, according to preliminary data. Monthly precipitation ranged from less than three inches to over 10 inches. Snow was a contributor to May's moisture levels, with many western South Dakota areas, including



PHOTO: METRO GRAPHICS

Bison, Martin and Interior, which reported more than 10 inches of snowfall on May 10 and 11, setting several new snowfall records for the month of May.

### CLIMATE OUTLOOK

National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) released the June 2015 Climate Outlook which Edwards calls "a mixed bag."

"The month appears to start off warmer than average, but temperatures could turn towards average or below average by the end of the month," she said. "Overall, NOAA's Climate Prediction Center has indicated equal chances of below, above and near median temperatures for the month."

As far as precipitation for the month ahead, Edwards said there is an increased likelihood of above median precipitation across most of the state, with higher probability along the Nebraska border. "If this monthly outlook holds true, it could mean the end to our worries of drought for a while," she said.

Edwards said El Nino continues to be a factor in this season's outlook, as a moderate to strong event is currently underway. "In general, El Nino means less likelihood of long-term extreme heat events and less likelihood of extended dry conditions in the summer season."

So far, Edwards said El Nino has been bountiful in bringing rain to our drought-plagued region of just four weeks ago. To learn more, visit iGrow.org.

## Making Sense Of Welfare Labeling Options

BROOKINGS — Many food labels bombard shoppers with various animal welfare claims as well as non-GMO or pasture raised references.

It can be just as confusing for producers to make sense of all these options when determining new marketing opportunities for their cattle, said Heidi Carroll, Livestock and Stewardship Extension Associate.

"These welfare food labels may be confusing and sometimes a bit misleading," Carroll said. "However, if producers take the time to read through the cattle care standards they may find that there are additional opportunities to sell their animals in a growing, consumer-driven market without much change to the way they already operate."

Below, Carroll discussed a few of the top-recognized labels and highlights husbandry practices that may require specific compliance.

• **WEANING:** Recommended weaning methods focus on current industry practices that minimize the stress to the animals. "Some suggested methods include: fenceline weaning, use of nose tabs or mixing heifers/dry cows with the calves," Carroll said. "It is preferred that calves suckle up to 6 months or at least not be weaned prior to 3 months of age."

Still other welfare labels, Carroll added may prefer that weaning occur naturally by the mother and calf. It is typically recommended that calves are weaned and vaccinated at least 30-45 days prior to shipping. Freshly weaned calves should not be transported. "Any deviations from the label standards, even due to uncontrollable measures (e.g. drought), must be documented and reviewed with the program staff," she said.

• **LAMENESS/BODY CONDITION:** Although pasture-raised beef cattle may have few foot problems, Carroll said a documented foot care plan is recommended for lameness.

"Lameness scoring is a useful tool to assess foot and leg problems and some welfare labels have specified minimums and maximums of acceptance for lameness scores during audits," she explained.

Efforts should be made to remove causes of lameness from the animal's environment. Body condition scoring (BCS) of animals is strongly recommended and part of the audit checklist. The labels follow industry best practices, but may state their own minimums and maximums for acceptable percentages for each BCS.

• **TRANSPORTATION:** Most of the standards required for transport by the welfare labels are the same as current industry best management practices.

— Transport of downed animals is prohibited.  
— Calves within seven days of weaning must not be transported more than three hours unless going into a breeding herd to improve herd genetics.

— Typically standards use the Federation of Animal Science Societies (FASS) transportation space guidelines