

Commentary

Bird Flu And Its Broader Impact

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

I haven't sold one carton of farm-fresh eggs since the news of Avian Influenza in the area broke in May. And now, our standard \$2-per-dozen — which used to be seen as our main hurdle to attracting customers in our rural county — is now below the average price for a carton of commercial eggs in the grocery store.

Farm-fresh eggs is very much a side business for us, though. We still have the sign posted at the end of our driveway, but we haven't done too much in the way of advertising



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this year at the local gas stations. We keep chickens for hobby, mostly, though we do love to eat the eggs ourselves. By the way, Avian Influenza does not infect humans and does not infect eggs, so consumers are safe. That, and our farm along with every other hobby farm around, is not infected with the bird flu. You'd know if one was — it'd be all over the news!

Actually, far more disappointing than not selling eggs — because we don't rely on the money from selling our eggs, really the excess of eggs around here is an inconvenience more than anything and we can always donate the extra eggs to the local homeless shelter or food pantries — is not being able to participate in all of the other activities we hobby poultry farmers like to do, like going to bird auctions, swap meets and shows.

I completely understand the need for the ban on poultry auctions and shows. But my oldest daughter is sad that she cannot show her chickens, ducks and pigeons at the county fair this first year in 4-H, and my 3-year-old son has asked many times in the last week why he can't take "Hairy Feet," his pet chicken, to the fair for the pre-4-H show. And my husband really does like going to a twice-a-year poultry auction.

The news of the poultry auction and show ban came right as we have several ducks sitting on clutches of eggs. One hen just came out with 12 ducklings! We raise show birds, but those show birds are most desirable in their first year as young birds, so this summer's chicks and ducklings are basically a lost "crop," so to speak.

We also have 10 half-grown chicks we were planning to replace some of our older layers when we sold them as stew chickens this fall. So, overall, we're looking at keeping a lot of extra birds until the movement ban is lifted. The feed bill is going to be a bit higher this year!

Other hobby poultry farmers know what I'm talking about, but those of you who aren't in the hobby poultry business, you're probably wondering what all the fuss is about. Here's an analogy for all the beef producers around here whose kids show in 4-H and FFA: What if during the BSE scare, the agriculture department put a ban on all beef cattle shows? Now, that would be disappointing.

Now, what if that ban was put into a place on beef cattle shows and you raised club calves for a living? Yeah, that'd be more than disappointing.

Yes, as hobby poultry farmers, we are not the same as commercial facilities in terms of egg and meat production — though there are still small-scale, non-commercial poultry farmers who do rely on the income from their egg and meat sales. But this poultry show/auction ban does have a major impact on us, regardless. It has an impact on our hopes and dreams for how we want to live and do business.

Take, for example, the recommendations to improve biosecurity in backyard flocks: to keep birds inside without access to space, water, etc. that may come in contact with wild animals. This is virtually impossible for us. Our facilities depend on the birds having access to open-air flight pens or free-range. They are not fitted to be able to house all of our birds inside comfortably on hot, summer days. Plus, the feed bill would be astronomical without the birds having access to free-ranging.

So while I completely understand the need for the ban to help prevent the spread of Avian Influenza in Nebraska and South Dakota and across the Midwest, it's important for people to understand that it's a lot bigger of a deal to us small-scale poultry people than what you may think of at first glance.

Points Of View



PHOTO: METRO GRAPHICS

Study Shows Rural, Urban Nebraskans Are Split On Quality Of Life

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

"The residents of Nebraska's smallest communities are those most likely to agree that individuals are powerless to shape their futures."

RANDY CANTRELL

LINCOLN, Neb. — Rural and urban Nebraskans don't always see eye to eye.

The Nebraska Rural Poll and the Nebraska Metro Poll have announced the results of a 2014 joint survey of residents from both non-metropolitan counties as well as the seven counties that comprise the Lincoln and Omaha metropolitan centers.

Results show significant differences in what residents in rural versus metropolitan counties see as important community attributes: Metropolitan Nebraskans view adequate information technology, recreational opportunities and available college classes as being essential to their quality of life; rural Nebraskans view a broad religious base as essential.

In addition, metropolitan residents are more likely than rural residents to see a need for better-maintained infrastructure in their communities, as well as having a stronger sense of personal safety.

And while both metropolitan and rural Nebraskans value health care services, urban residents view them as more essential to their communities.

"In the past, every small community seemed to have a hospital, whereas today you may see a clinic with visiting physicians and health care workers," said Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, Extension community development specialist at the University of Nebraska's Panhandle Research and Extension Center in Scottsbluff, Neb. "What is often hidden to many residents is that the clinics and smaller hospitals are linked to larger regional health care institutions that are investing in their infrastructure to accommodate the new model."

Areas that both metropolitan and rural Nebraskans value equally in their quality of life measure-

ments are effective community leadership, a quality school system and low cost of living.

Aspects of their communities that rural residents are satisfied with include personal safety, religion, transportation and job security. Metropolitan residents tend to like their communities' housing, health care, job opportunities and retirement financial security.

Overall, the Polls found that rural residents tended to be more pessimistic toward their outlook in life satisfaction. Metropolitan residents tended to respond that they were better off than they were five years ago and would be better off in 10 years. The survey results associated rural residents' responses to these questions with the relative lack of job opportunities and retirement-age financial security in rural counties.

"In more rural places, residents are less likely to observe a lot of economic growth or new development, such as new housing or new businesses," said Randy Cantrell, rural sociologist at the Nebraska Rural Future Institute in Lincoln. "For residents of these communities, it seems likely that experience tends to limit the level of confidence that they have in the future."

Both Polls found that differences in outlook varied by household income, age and education level. People with higher household incomes as well as younger people were more likely to be optimistic. Rural counties tended to have older, lower-income populations than metropolitan counties.

"The residents of Nebraska's smallest communities are those most likely to agree that individuals are powerless to shape their futures," Cantrell said. "The residents of the largest non-metropolitan communities are more likely to disagree with such statements."

Jake Geis

Ways To Improve Cattle Movement Through Facilities During Handling

BY JAKE GEIS, DVM
Tyndall

Processing cattle is hard work. Whether it is for implanting, castrating, preg checking or any other activity, it seems cattle are not big fans of moving from a comfortable pen or pasture into a single file line to enter the chute. This distaste for being moved is exacerbated by exciting them or having distractions in the direction we want them to move. Taking the time to remove distractions and practicing low stress cattle handling can make things easier on both us and the cattle, as well as help the job go faster and smoother.

A key to making a job go smooth is to make sure all people involved understand what their role will be and how the cattle should move through the facility. If you or any person is new to the facility, take time to look at the layout and figure out how the cattle are supposed to move through the facility before starting. Have one leader to educate and organize so people don't attempt to move cattle against each other.

This is also a good time to recognize any potential distractions that could make cattle balk. Chains or wire hanging in the alley, or coats thrown on the fence distract cattle. This will cause them to stop when they should move forward; therefore remove them before processing. If cattle need to move into a building while processing, a dark interior will unnerve them. If you enhance the light indoors it will make the transition from outside to inside less dramatic and the cattle will move inside more efficiently.

If there is an unexperienced person in the processing crew, the first thing that person needs to understand in order to move cattle in a low stress manner is the "flight zone" concept. The area around an animal that when a human enters causes the animal to move away from that human is termed the flight zone. For example, in a tame dairy cow a person needs to be within a couple feet of the cow before she decides to move. On the opposite end of the spectrum, coming within a hundred yards of western range cattle will cause them to move away from you.

The key to using the flight zone to your advantage is to apply just enough pressure to make the animal move. Too much pressure will cause the animal to panic, making them behave

irrationally. This can lead to jumping fences and other unwanted behaviors.

The second concept is understanding animal's shoulder is the point where an animal decides which direction to move away from the human. If you enter the flight zone behind the shoulder, such as towards the hip, the animal will want to move forward. It will move backward if you approach the head. This may seem like common sense, but if you aren't aware of your surroundings you might violate this concept. For example, if you just finished moving an animal into the chute and continue to stand in that area, you will keep the cattle in the alley from moving forward. This can cause the people moving the cattle from the tub or Bud Box into the alley to become quite irritated with your location. If you are working with my Dad, you would probably be informed, "You're in a bad spot!" and need to move immediately. This would most likely not be heard in a loving voice either.

Although it is not necessary speak with a loving voice, voice volume control is important when working cattle. There is a tendency for some people when moving cattle to start shouting the minute you want the cattle to move. This is counterproductive. Your presence alone is enough to make the cattle move. Shouting and loud voices only rile them up, causing them to look for the nearest exit rather than look for the area you want them to move towards.

Another counterproductive handling method is moving too many cattle into the facility at one time. Crowding tubs and Bud Boxes are designed to hold only as many animals as the alley fits. If more are put into them, the cattle cannot circle and won't have enough room to file into the alley. If the alley only fits three head, only put three head in the tub.

Processing cattle doesn't have to be a dreaded event. If the processing crew, which often includes family members, plans ahead and practices good handling techniques the job can be quite relatively low-stress for both cattle and people. This leads to happy suppers that night and cattle that perform better.

Jake Geis, DVM, works out of the Tyndall Veterinary Clinic.

PF Pollinator Program Sign-Up Is Under Way

BROOKINGS — Pheasants Forever has partnered with Project Apis m. and Brown-ing's Honey to offer landowners in North Dakota and South Dakota a new conservation program, the Honey Bee and Monarch Butterfly Partnership, designed specifically to create native wildflower and grassland plots that positively influence upland bird, bee and butterfly populations.

The Honey Bee and Monarch Butterfly Partnership is forged out of a desire to create diverse, high-quality upland habitat, especially in the wake of recent grassland habitat loss in the Dakotas. Not only do North Dakota and South Dakota harbor the top two wild pheasant populations in the country, but they are two of the top three honey producing states. Honey producers and landowners are working side-by-side to promote this innovative program.

"This habitat program is designed to create phenomenal habitat for pheasants and other grassland-dependent species, habitat that will also increase populations of native pollinators," says Pete Berthelsen, director of habitat partnerships for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever. "Our seed mixes provide seasonal habitat for pollinating insects, which also creates a bug-rich environment for pheasant and quail broods — an essential component of any upland habitat management plan."

Monarch butterflies and honey bees are also important resources for agricultural crops in terms of the pollination benefits offered for common household foods. These benefits are threatened by the continued loss of habitat throughout the Great Plains and the subsequent effects on pollinators. Eastern monarch butterfly populations, for example, have declined by 90 percent in the last two decades as a result of habitat loss and drought.

The Honey Bee and Monarch Butterfly Partnership sets a new standard for pollinator-friendly mixes, as they've been created beyond the current U.S. Department of Agriculture specifications. This, Berthelsen says, has allowed for the