

# Avian Flu

There has been a lot of speculation about the possibilities of Avian Flu in New York and the ramifications for poultry producers here. Reactions in the world-wide medical community range from "the sky is falling," to "don't worry be happy." The position that would probably best serve the public interest would be somewhere in the middle. Something like how they used to describe being cautious or watchful in the old-time western movies, we need to "keep our eyes peeled." USDA and APHIS, along with the CDC and WHO are keeping a watchful eye on world-wide developments with the disease and charting its migration and means of mobility.

We should have protocol systems in place for when the Avian Flu (H5N1 or similar) gets here. Ag and Markets has a very helpful segment on their website which I think is fairly comprehensive... <http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us/AI/AvianFlu.html>

I also look to the other organizations' websites that were mentioned earlier, for helpful hints, amount and methods of spread, and possible "weak links" that we might be able to use against the disease. The USGS has a helpful map site that shows where the outbreaks are and several different hotspots and it is kept fairly current. It can be found at:  
[http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease\\_information/avian\\_influenza\\_maps.jsp](http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/disease_information/avian_influenza_maps.jsp)

Since it has been found in wild migratory birds as far out as Europe; Italy, France Germany, Romania, etc. It looks like to me that the eventuality is going to be sooner, rather than later. As of this writing (3/1/06) Germany and France had positive cases and the Bahama Islands (yes, the Caribbean Bahamas!) had 30 birds dead from "mysterious" causes? At the Agroforestry Resource Center, CCE will present a program very soon about the avian flu in regard to pre-emptive protocol, especially in regard to small flock, backyard owners. Cornell has several leading health officials involved internationally working on various aspects of the disease. If we can include some of these folks in an interactive program, we could be close to the cutting edge in getting the overall message out. We're working on that kind of a program for the very near future.

As for what my old-time cowboy logic is on the subject, I'd include the following protocol measures. Or, if I were still in the chicken ranching business, I'd be trying to head off problems before they became such... Since it's not very likely that we will be importing, or smuggling chickens in from China or even Turkey, the probable method of spread to here (if it occurs) will be migratory birds, most likely water fowl. That would mean to me, that I would have to develop methods and systems to exclude my barnyard poultry from the ponds, lakes, or streams where the wild birds could intermingle their nasal discharges with my flock or leave dangerous droppings behind. The free-range and pastured poultry operations would probably have to be "corralled," or at least "reined in" a little - based on the contingency that the AI was close by. Being able to pen the birds up for an indefinite amount of time with a top on the pen would be a good thing to do, and construction efforts should be under way to make that happen(at least a

little at a time) right about now. If it got to a point where AI was "around," and I had sick, hot birds, with excessive nasal and anal discharge, and that their heads and combs swelled way up, I'd sure enough isolate them and not handle them, nor let anyone but official folks be near them - I would put on a mask, gloves, and "booties" around where they were, and get their immediately lifeless bodies to the diagnostic lab in double plastic bags, in hopes that they find out that they ate a bunch of yellow jackets. In the event it wasn't yellow jackets, I would comply completely with health department officials in destroying the flock and disposing of them immediately, and disinfecting the "limited" premises that they were allowed access to. Being ready to react in prophylaxis can "head off" most issues at "the pass," rather than letting it into "the Valley." Basically, I think it all comes back to keeping our "ears to the ground" and our "eyes peeled" and then being able to "run for the tall timber" when (and if) this issue unfolds here in New York

If the risk for the disease to be here actually becomes imminent, the small, backyard producer will have to weigh carefully the benefits of retaining their flock, compared to the cost of gearing up to keep the flock enclosed and wild birds excluded. Along with that, they will have to have to place into the equation, their reasons for having the poultry, and the philosophical reasoning for using the methods by which they are being raised. We'll visit some more about this and about the proposed program.

Don't worry, but do keep your eyes peeled...

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