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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 12/1/2022

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Avian Influenza Confirmed in Third Arkansas Poultry Flock; Producers Urged to Take Precautions

LITTLE ROCK, AR – Testing has confirmed a case of avian influenza in a backyard flock in Arkansas County that had shown increased mortality over the course of several days.

This is the third case of avian influenza in Arkansas this year. Earlier this year the Department confirmed cases of avian influenza on a poultry farm in Madison County and on a farm in Pope County.

“We will continue to work with poultry growers, the industry, and our laboratory partners to protect against the spread of avian influenza,” said Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward. “Arkansas poultry is safe to eat, and consumers can be confident in the safety of their food.”

“The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is urging poultry owners to increase biosecurity measures on their operations in response to several reports of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in wild birds along the Mississippi Flyway,” said Patrick Fisk, Livestock and Poultry Division Director.

Avian influenza is an airborne respiratory virus that spreads easily among chickens through nasal and eye secretions, as well as manure. The virus can be spread in various ways from flock to flock, including by wild birds, through contact with infected poultry, by equipment, and on the clothing and shoes of caretakers. There is no public health concern, and avian influenza does not affect poultry meat or egg products, which remain safe to eat.

To mitigate the disease risk from contact with the birds or their droppings, the Livestock and Poultry Division strongly recommends taking the following steps for the next 30 days, especially within the Delta area:

- Keep your birds indoors or covered to prevent exposure to wild or migratory birds.
- Restrict access to any source of water that may have been contaminated by wild birds.
- Implement strict biosecurity on the premises. Alert all farm personnel of the increased risk of HPAI. Especially focusing on biosecurity methods to prevent exposure to wild waterfowl or their droppings.

All poultry flock owners are encouraged to follow the strictest biosecurity on their farms to prevent the spread of the disease. Those steps include:

- Limit, monitor, and record any movement of people, vehicles, or animals on or off your farm.
- Permit only essential workers and vehicles to enter the farm to limit the chances of bringing the virus from an outside source.
- Avoid visiting other poultry farms and any unnecessary travel off the farm.
- Disinfect equipment, vehicles, footwear, and other items that come into contact with flocks.
- Keep your flock away from wild or migratory birds, especially waterfowl.
- Isolate any ill animals and contact your veterinarian.

For more information on avian influenza visit aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/avian-influenza/ai and for information on protecting poultry, visit aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/animal-disease-information/avian/defend-the-flock-program. Backyard flock owners who have sick or unusual deaths in their flocks should email info@agriculture.arkansas.gov or call (501) 823-1746.

Additional background

Avian influenza (AI) is caused by an influenza type A virus that can infect poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, domestic ducks, geese, and guinea fowl) and is carried by free flying waterfowl and wild birds, such as ducks, geese, raptors, and shorebirds. AI viruses are classified by a combination of two groups of proteins: hemagglutinin or “H” proteins, of which there are 16 (H1–H16), and neuraminidase or “N” proteins, of which there are 9 (N1–N9). Many different combinations of “H” and “N” proteins are possible. Each combination is considered a different subtype and can be further broken down into different strains which circulate within flyways/geographic regions. AI viruses are further classified by their pathogenicity (low or high)—the ability of a particular virus strain to produce disease in domestic poultry.

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