



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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PA Agriculture Secretary Provides Update on Avian Influenza Emergency Planning, Response

Gov. Wolf Secures \$3.5 Million to Prepare For Deadly Poultry Virus

Harrisburg, PA – As the commonwealth continues to plan a response to highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) – a virus that has decimated flocks in the western two-thirds of the country – Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding emphasized today that the state Department of Agriculture has the financial resources available to continue its work and be ready, should an outbreak occur in the commonwealth.

“We want to be clear that avian influenza has not been found in our state, but we need to plan and act as if it could at any moment, which is a distinct possibility,” Redding said. “When this virus hit in 1983 and 1984, 17 million birds were lost. That equated to a \$65 million negative impact to our state’s economy. We are doing everything possible to avoid that kind of devastation – or worse – with this outbreak.”

Redding said Governor Wolf has approved \$3.5 million for the department, which would be on the front line of any response, to continue its planning work and mount a response to any initial outbreak, but the size and scope of that response is uncertain.

“What we have learned from other states, such as Iowa and Minnesota, is that acting quickly is imperative to containing the virus and minimizing its spread,” Redding added. “That’s why having the resources the governor has made available is so critical; it gives us the funding we need to continue planning, continue putting supplies and personnel in place, and continue our work to protect the tens of thousands of Pennsylvania families who depend on our poultry industry for their livelihood.”

Redding explained that nationwide, more than 220 flocks have been infected by HPAI, killing approximately 50 million birds. The virus has spread west to east across the United States since December primarily through migratory birds from the Pacific to the Central flyway to the Mississippi flyway. The Atlantic flyway, which intersects with the Mississippi flyway and overlies Pennsylvania, has not shown birds carrying the virus to date.

Since February of this year, the department has been working diligently with industry members, as well as representatives of the academic community, to prepare for this threat and protect the state’s \$13 billion poultry industry. Over the past five months, the department has, among other things:

- Convened a high-path AI task force with the industry and academia to collaborate on all aspects of response and recovery planning
- Held multiple briefings with Governor Wolf, cabinet members, and legislators to discuss the situation and the needed steps to be taken should the virus be found here

- Conducted numerous tabletop exercises to practice various scenarios and familiarize the department's staff and industry stakeholders with response and recovery activities in the event of an outbreak
- Met with the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, the departments of General Services (DGS) and Environmental Protection, the State Police, the Game Commission, the Air National Guard, and U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) Veterinary Services and Wildlife Services to discuss possible needs during a large outbreak
- Established response protocols with USDA APHIS and discussed [biosecurity measures](#) for responders and the industry, as well as protocols for federal indemnification, the depopulation and disposal of dead birds, and how to manage the movement of poultry and poultry products into, within and out of quarantine zones
- Suspended all avian shows at county fairs in 2015 and at the 2016 Pennsylvania Farm Show
- Issued an interstate quarantine order requiring all poultry moving to live bird markets and flocks producing eggs destined for commercial breaking operations in Pennsylvania to meet a 72-hour testing requirement

The department is also working with DGS to assess the necessary supplies and skill sets needed in a response, while finding ways to utilize current commonwealth employees or existing statewide staff augmentation contracts to provide support. State officials also continue exploring other options to ensure that the needed resources are readily available.

"We have been fortunate enough to dodge this virus so far, but when birds begin migrating again this fall, we can't say with certainty that we will continue to be so lucky," said Redding. "That is why it is imperative that measures be put into place now to protect our state's poultry industry.

Redding also cautioned that while the department is presently focused on the first two phases of emergency preparedness – planning and response – officials and the industry must continue thinking about the eventual recovery phase, which could last for months, if not years. Those in the poultry industry should be thinking about how they will manage if their flock is infected and the time lost before they could repopulate.

To learn more about avian influenza preparedness efforts to date, visit the department's website at www.agriculture.state.pa.us and click on the "Avian Influenza" banner at the top of the page.

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