

Why All NAGA Members Should Be Worried About Avian Influenza

In light of the recent outbreaks of highly pathogenic (High Path) Avian Influenza (AI), it's important that gamebird producers and hunting preserves understand the situation and take action to protect themselves.

Until the recent outbreaks, there had not been an outbreak of High Path AI in the United States for many years. We know that the entry point into the domestic poultry for these recent outbreaks is most likely migratory ducks and other waterfowl. The AI virus is harbored in waterfowl feces, and spread into commercial poultry on shoes or clothing or equipment. The AI virus is most active during cool, wet periods. Once we start having 70+ degree days, and the migration of waterfowl has mostly passed, the chances of transmission and resulting outbreaks decreases (until this Fall).

The commercial poultry industry has many bio-security protocols in place and nearly all commercial poultry is raised inside. Regardless of those protocols, AI has infected a number of indoor flocks over the past few months. This is why we as gamebird producers should wake up!

With nearly all of our gamebirds being raised in outdoor pens, our birds are especially vulnerable to AI, as we have far less control of exposure than producers whose birds are all inside. If a U.S. flock of gamebirds is diagnosed with High Path AI, the farm will be depopulated (all the birds will be euthanized). After a period of time, it's possible the farm could start again with new stock. But I think we all should be aware that an AI outbreak on a farm could mean the end of that business.

There are a number of things you can do. First of all, institute the recommended bio security measures on your farm immediately. Articles in this issue of NAGA News address what bio security measures should be put into place.

Make sure to test your birds for AI, since if your birds do happen to

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get AI and you have been testing the government will indemnify (pay you) for 100% of your losses. If you haven't been testing, indemnification is only 25% of your loss. There are a number of ways to test for AI. Several methods (blood test and egg tests) test only for AI antibodies, and present the chance of a “false positive”. PCR or tracheal swabs identify if there is

AI virus, and is the method of choice. Make sure if you test to use PCR.

Your local vet or state officials can assist you in testing your birds for AI. You can also contact our NAGA Executive Director Rob Sexton for assistance, and we will direct you appropriately. Avian Influenza is a BIG deal, and it's important we all take the risk of an outbreak seriously and do all we can do to try and prevent AI from spreading.

Also, it would be in your best interest to inform any neighboring farm owners to be aware of AI. Talk to your neighbors about the importance of bio-security. If a poultry farm nearby to your farm is found to have AI, a quarantine zone put into place would prevent you from bringing in poultry or selling or transporting out poultry. A quarantine might be even worse for a farm owner than an outbreak of

AI, as no indemnity will be paid. The quarantine zone may be as little as 3 km (1.8 miles) from the epicenter of an outbreak to 10 km (6 miles) from the epicenter. The bottom line is, your neighbor's poultry farm management may directly affect you! So it would pay to be proactive and open the lines of communications between your farm and your neighbors. ★

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