

FACT SHEET

Good Flock Management: About the Texas and U.S. Poultry Industry

Avian influenza, also known as “bird flu,” comes in several different types. There are milder forms, as well as more serious types known as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). These more severe strains can result in high mortality in poultry. The strain currently found in Asia is H5N1 HPAI or “Asian bird flu.” This strain has resulted in high mortality in poultry flocks and has caused illness and even death in humans who have had very close contact with live, infected birds.

We do not have H5N1 HPAI in Texas or anywhere else in the U.S., and we have never had it. In addition, no states in the U.S. have ever imported poultry from Asia, where most of the cases of avian influenza have occurred. In Asia, particularly in Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, poultry production conditions are dramatically different than those here in the U.S. In these countries poultry live in close conjunction with swine, other livestock and humans. Chickens often roam freely through villages, sometimes near areas that children use as playgrounds. Further, live birds are sold by the millions in city markets where they can infect each other and possibly infect humans.

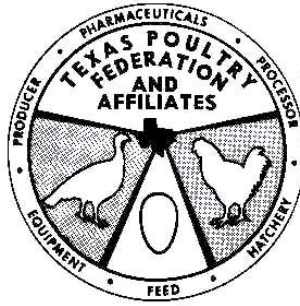
“In Asia, particularly in Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, poultry production conditions are dramatically different than those here in the U.S... Chickens often roam freely through villages...”

In contrast, the overwhelming majority of chickens and turkeys in Texas and throughout the U.S. are raised in sheltered conditions where they have no contact with other animals and very minimal contact with humans. In fact, few humans in the U.S. ever encounter a live chicken or turkey, thus limiting any potential transmission of avian influenza from poultry to humans. Additionally, the U.S. government and the poultry industry are working together on extensive flock testing and surveillance programs to ensure early detection of any incursion of the avian influenza virus—mild as well as severe—into a flock.

In Texas, all testing is done at the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory (TVMDL) under the supervision of Executive Director Dr. Lelve Gayle.

TVMDL operates three poultry labs in the state located in College Station, Gonzales, and Center. TVMDL is at the forefront for identifying and helping prevent the spread of animal diseases, including avian flu. As one of five hubs in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN) established after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the TVMDL has upgraded its facilities, trained more people and purchased state-of-the-art robotic equipment. In addition, the College Station facility added a Bio-Safety Level 3 capability veterinary diagnostic lab in 2004.

Since Texas implemented its voluntary testing program in 1995, the industry has tested over 200,000 samples per year. In fiscal year 2005 alone, over 366,665 tests for avian influenza were conducted.



If dangerous types of avian influenza are ever found in Texas or other parts of the U.S., strict controls are in place to provide for immediate eradication. These controls include destroying and disposing, through environmentally sound methods, any flock in which dangerous strains of avian influenza are found or through controlled slaughter and strict quarantines—in keeping with recommendations of the World Organization for Animal Health. The Texas poultry industry, working closely with the Texas Department of Health and the state Animal Health Commission, has developed a comprehensive eradication plan in the event a case of avian influenza occurs in the state.

The U.S. poultry industry has stringent policies on biosecurity to prevent viruses from being inadvertently carried onto the farms where birds are produced. These policies include thorough cleaning and disinfecting of all equipment and vehicles, providing clean and protective clothing for all personnel, permitting only essential personnel and vehicles to enter the farm, limiting or avoiding visits to other bird farms, and protecting flocks from contact with wild or migratory birds. In addition federal scientists are monitoring migratory birds in Alaska for any indication that migratory birds are carrying the avian influenza virus into North America. More than 12,000 samples have been collected without a sign of H5N1 HPAI detected to date.