



The Food Safety NETWORK

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A quarterly newsletter from Food Safety Net Services

CAUGHT 'N THE NET

Will Avian Influenza (H5N1) Cause a Worldwide Pandemic?

By Dr. Gary Smith

Almost weekly, another country detects a case of Avian Influenza (AI) caused by the virus H5N1. The United Nations announced recently that AI (H5N1) could reach the Americas by September 2006 as infected wild birds migrate toward the Arctic and Alaska.

Whether or not AI (H5N1) poses a threat to human health in the US, it is already affecting trade. People—worldwide—have stopped eating chicken even though humans cannot catch the disease by eating properly cooked poultry. US poultry producers—already facing lower prices for their products—now must deal with depressed export markets.



AI (H5N1) has spread across Asia and to Europe via: (a) migratory birds, (b) illegal trade of wild birds, (c) cockfighting, (d) religious practices (in which people kiss a small bird and release it into the wild), and (e) wet market trade

(birds held alive and individually harvested upon purchase). If AI (H5N1) arrives in North America, it will come via migratory birds, but because their flyways are North to South, it would spread East to West via illegal trade of wild birds and cockfighting.

Its rapid spread and human fatalities (more than 100) have generated fear of a worldwide flu pandemic. A

“pandemic” occurs when: (a) a new form of a virus emerges (or an older form re-emerges), (b) it spreads to humans, and (c) it spreads easily among humans. With AI (H5N1)...

the first two conditions have been met, but not the third. US deaths from past pandemics were: (a) 500,000 (50 million worldwide) from Spanish Flu in 1918-1919, (b) 70,000 from Asian Flu in 1957-1958, and (c) 34,000 from Hong Kong Flu in 1968-1969.

A Harvard School of Public Health survey (January 2006) found that: (a) 57% of Americans are concerned about the potential spread of bird flu to the US, (b) 24% think it will hit US poultry, and (c) 14% think it will affect humans.

We are preparing for AI (H5N1); APHIS-USDA has a response plan and is conducting a targeted surveillance program in both wild and domesticated birds. The National Chicken Council has achieved almost complete compliance for 100% flock testing for AI (H5N1). USD-HHS is fine-tuning its “Pandemic Influenza Operational Plan.” And, FDA just published a proposed final rule to prohibit the extra-label use in poultry of two antiviral drugs (“adamantane” and “neuraminidase inhibitor”) to help preserve the effectiveness of these drugs for use in humans.

Rest assured, the government and industry are preparing for a case, an outbreak and even for a pandemic. ■



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An Effective Animal Welfare Program

By Jarrod Miller, Audit Specialist

Some purchasers of red meat and/or poultry require that companies who sell them those products be audited, by a third party, on an annual basis.

There are **three key areas** your company can address to be successful in animal welfare audits required by customers.

Facilities that are successful year in and year out with animal welfare audits undergo self auditing of core criteria on a regular basis. Different species have different criteria which are identified by large trade organizations such as the American Meat Institute and the National Chicken Council. Audits are most effective when conducted on a monthly basis. Some proactive companies conduct mini-audits in critical areas (insensibility, stunning, broken wings, etc.) often weekly or daily, with a complete audit covering the critical areas and facility areas on a monthly basis. It is important to document findings of internal audits. This accumulates a large amount of data for trend analysis and identifies problem areas before an auditor even arrives. Areas of improvement can be identified and corrected without resulting in a deduction or failure on your third party audit.

Proper training for employees is critical in maintaining an effective welfare program. All employees who might handle live animals should be trained prior to starting work. This provides them with the fundamental knowledge to be able to do their job safely and without causing undue stress on the animals. Retraining is also necessary to keep your employees up-to-date with the current standards and any new information that has been developed since the initial training. It is recommended that employees be retrained on an annual basis. Training also conveys to employees the seriousness of the issue and gives them an understanding of the necessity of treating all animals humanely.

Upper management support is critical for the maintenance and effectiveness of an animal welfare program. Providing the equipment and funds necessary also reinforces to employees that animal welfare is a critical area for the company, customers and consumers. Outstanding facilities have plant managers and supervisors who are knowledgeable and interested in the well-being of animals.

Food Safety Net Services is dedicated to being your partner in establishing and upholding a sound animal welfare program. Our auditors undergo extensive training with world recognized leaders in the field of animal welfare and conduct numerous audits for customers across North America. If you have need of a third party audit or information regarding establishing and animal welfare program, please contact us. ■



Meet Jenny Triplett!



Food Safety Net Services is pleased to welcome Jenny Triplett as the Technical Sales Representative for the Wisconsin/Midwest region.

Jenny joins FSNS after numerous years of experience in the industry as a Food Microbiology Laboratory Manager. While managing the laboratory, Jenny was responsible for developing and implementing Quality Control programs and writing Standard Operating Procedures for numerous methodologies. She also initiated the AOAC accreditation process for her laboratory.

Jenny graduated with an Associate's Degree in Biotechnology from MATC-Madison and a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Business Management from Ottawa University in Brookfield, WI. She has recently been accepted into the MBA program at UW-Milwaukee and plans to begin work on her advanced degree in the near future.

Please join us in welcoming Jenny to the Food Safety Net Services family!

Contact Jenny at 414.529.3305 or email jtriplett@food-safetynet.com. ■

Stop By and Visit Our Booth at These Upcoming Trade Shows!

May 6-9

United Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Association Produce Expo & Conference (Chicago, IL) Booth #11116

June 24-28

IFT Food Expo (Orlando, FL) Booth #3935

July 12-13

Safe Food Conference (Phoenix, AZ)

July 19-22

Southwest Meat Association Annual Meeting (San Antonio, TX)

August 13-16

IAFP Annual Meeting and Convention (Calgary, Alberta, Canada)



Do you know?...

- What is equipped with a commercial test kitchen?
- What includes a state-of-the-art education facility?
- What is furnished with the latest technology in laboratory equipment?
- What will provide an environment to continue FSNS's unsurpassed customer service?

Exciting things are happening at Food Safety Net Services. Look for the answers in Food Safety Net Services' 3rd Quarter Newsletter!



For comments on this newsletter, please contact Terri Pease at (210) 477-3626 or newsletter@food-safetynet.com.

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Being Prepared is More than a Plan on Paper

Linda Detwiler, D.V.M. (Guest Contributor)



Highly pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Classical Swine Fever (CSF), Nipah virus... These highly contagious or zoonotic diseases could be introduced into the United States at any time. The introduction could be accidental or deliberate, but the results could be disastrous. Companies need to be prepared for such occurrences as shortages of supply (possible for multiple commodities), a food scare, or a real problem associated with their food supply and the communication associated with all of these.

It is important for companies having any involvement in the food supply chain to have contingency plans in the event of a disease outbreak. Global sourcing, extensive travel and terrorism have increased the vulnerability of the world's livestock and poultry populations. No country is immune to a natural, purposeful or even an accidental introduction of disease. Highly contagious diseases with significant mortality or morbidity have been known to cause major disruptions in the availability of supply. For example, Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) is spread primarily by movement of infected cloven hoofed livestock. One could potentially expect extensive quarantines to stop the transmission. In addition, the virus is widely distributed throughout the bodies of cattle, pigs and sheep, hence even products such as milk are affected even though they are not a risk to human health. Diseases such as the highly pathogenic H5N1 form of avian influenza is highly contagious to poultry and can cause human death.

Many companies and organizations have contingency or emergency plans for such events and crisis situations and if they don't, they should. A crisis event is not the time to have to research technical details, determine who has responsibility for certain responses OR discover that responses in one part of the organization conflict with the response of another section or with a regulatory agency. It is definitely not the time to be trying to think of messages for the media or if the company will even speak to the media. A number of these plans may have been developed some years ago and have not been updated. Many plans have never been tested to see how well they would deliver results if the organization needs to react.

Ask yourselves:

- If product could not be sourced in the US, could it be imported? From where? With what regulatory hurdles?
- Do you have viable product alternatives? Will these be compatible with the processing options?
- Is your communications team familiar with your food safety standards and quality assurance procedures so that they can defend product safety to the media?
- Your company may know the staff of the government agencies that regulate them? Do you know the staff of other government agencies that control and eradicate these diseases?
- If a customer or employee becomes sick or claims to have become sick with one of these diseases from your product, how would you respond?

Even if you have contingency plans for the above scenarios, these plans should be checked for reality. Food Safety Net Services can assist your company in developing, executing and evaluating a test exercise. A test exercise should be limited to one disease; however it may be narrowly focused to examine the response of one section of the organization. Alternatively it may be broad in scope, executed to test all parts of the organization which would likely be affected by the event. The test exercise usually occurs in 3 stages: planning, execution, and evaluation. A brief overview of each stage is provided below.

Planning: One of the initial decisions a company must make is what disease to use as a test model, the extent of the test and who from the company will be involved with planning and then execution. For logistical reasons the planners are not players in the exercise itself. They are used as facilitators. Hence it is important for a company to determine who is essential for execution – those individuals should not be a planner. During the planning phase Food Safety Net Services will work with the company to define the scope of the exercise and develop the scenario. This will be done to make the exercise as real to life as possible. There is usually one primary scenario and several additional events which are introduced during the exercise to stress the system, as usually occurs in real life.

Execution: On the day of the exercise Food Safety Net Services, in collaboration with the company, will facilitate the exercise. We will simulate and/or generate responses for outside parties including any government entities, media etc. not actually playing in the test. We can also provide observers to document the response. This documentation will assist in the evaluation. Many organizations have concerns about leaks or misinterpretations during the event which may generate an authentic scare. The exercise is conducted with all intent to prevent this. A set of game rules is provided to participating plants. These are intended to assist with the smooth execution of the simulated event as well as prevent information from being misinterpreted.

Evaluation: This is one of the most essential components of the entire exercise. It can be conducted in stages. It is recommended that at least a short review occur immediately after the exercise while everyone's memory is fresh. A more in-depth evaluation session should be scheduled within two weeks. At this time, information should be gathered for a written report which will summarize what went well, what did not go well, gaps and suggested actions for improvements. Follow up action should be identified and a timeline for accomplishment should be established. For areas where there are opportunities for improvement, smaller scale simulations could be developed to test the remediation.

Time and effort are needed to develop sound contingency plans. All of this work may be wasted if they sit on the shelf and collect dust. They can also fall short if critical concepts are inadvertently omitted. However, if the plans are tested and modified and continue to improve, they become part of the corporate culture and are more likely to be used and to be useful. Don't let your emergency plan become a document that only the "old timers" know about. **Work it, because you never know when you will need it!** ■

Bringing the world of food safety to you.