Poultry industry dealing with HPAI threat

The United States poultry industry and backyard poultry farmers have been on high alert since February as outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), also called bird flu, have been affecting their flocks of birds. HPAI strikes fear in poultry owners due to the necessity to depopulate flocks who are found to be affected by this fatal disease that has an aptitude for spreading rapidly from farm to farm and bird to bird. HPAI has now been diagnosed in multiple states, including those surrounding New Jersey. HPAI has been detected in New York State, Delaware, Maryland and Connecticut to name a few. HPAI is of huge concern to the United States poultry industry as this disease is highly fatal to domesticated birds while also having the ability to spread quickly between birds and farms. HPAI spreads in multiple ways:

- Direct spread of this disease is possible if poultry come in direct contact with infected wild birds such as waterfowl and shorebirds.
- Indirect spread via any surface contaminated with the virus. A good example of this is thinking about a sick person who coughs into their hand, touches a doorknob, and then the next person who touches the doorknob comes in contact with the other person's sickness.

For poultry, this indirect spread could be via egg crates, buckets, boots, feed, bedding, human clothing, water that has been defecated in by wild birds, tires from farm equipment/vehicles, etc.

The signs of disease in domesticated poultry are respiratory signs such as trouble breathing, lethargy, diarrhea, twisted necks, tremors, and sudden death.

If any of these signs are noted in your flock, it is imperative to have your veterinarian come out to assess your animals and determine if HPAI is the cause.

Given the high death rate of this disease, it is crucial to act quickly to prevent the spread of HPAI. It is important to report any suspected cases to local animal health officials to prevent further outbreaks. Farmers and backyard poultry owners should take steps to protect their flocks by practicing good biosecurity measures, such as limiting access to their farms and disinfecting equipment and vehicles.

Another garden

Each year around this time we open our family vegetable garden for another season. Every year we consider what we will plant, and we take a moment to discern if anything new will be experimented with.

Of course, tomatoes are always on the list, and it is a process to pick which varieties and sizes will make their way into the limited space in our little garden.

It is the same way with the "garden" that is our life, lived in the soil of our Christian Faith. Periodically we need to turn over the ground — mix it up to bring new life into it.

Then, after discernment, we can plant — and anticipate the harvest from among the resources and gifts that God provides.
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HPAI is a severe, viral infection of the breathing system of birds. The "highly pathogenic" prefix notes the highly fatal nature of the viral infection in poultry. HPAI is rapidly fatal in domesticated birds but typically is not as fatal in wild birds. This creates the risk of outbreaks in the United States — the wild bird populations are constantly spreading this disease amongst themselves with little to no outward signs of disease.

When these infected birds or bird materials, like fecal material, contact domesticated poultry, fatal outbreaks occur in domesticated bird populations.

What can we do to protect our flocks here in New Jersey? The best way to handle HPAI, and any disease for that matter, is to prevent the disease rather than responding after the disease has struck our flocks. I always think of the phrase "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

I've heard this phrase thrown around both in my personal and professional lives for years and now contact with wild birds.

This can be done by securing feeding bins, preventing your birds from freely wondering around your property, covering/enclosing the areas your poultry spend time, keeping your flock away from water sources that are accessible to wild birds, and securing your coups in a way that limits the contact your flock can have with wild birds.

Overall, the main way New Jerseyans can protect their birds is to remain on high alert and to implement strong biosecurity plans on their farms.

HPAI has been diagnosed in surrounding states and has been diagnosed in wild bird populations within New Jersey.

Knowing the disease is in our wild bird populations further emphasizes the need for New Jersey poultry producers to keep their flocks under close watch for disease and to strictly follow strong biosecurity protocols.