

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the U.S. poultry industry co-hosted the International Conference on Avian Influenza and Poultry Trade on June 22-24, 2015, in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. The goals of the conference were to review the risks of introduction of avian influenza viruses through global trade in poultry and poultry products, and to discuss appropriate measures to mitigate these risks. Among the 200 participants were personnel from APHIS and other USDA and Federal agencies; State Animal Health Officials from Alabama, Arkansas, and Indiana; representatives from the European Union, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; Chief Veterinary Officers and subject matter experts from 37 countries around the world; and representatives from the United States and international poultry industry.

Emerging from the conversation were seven key issues or themes common to trading partners affected by avian influenza:

1. complying with international standards,
2. accepting zoning or compartmentalization,
3. ensuring biosecurity,
4. the acceptability of vaccination as an eradication tool,
5. applying appropriate movement restrictions and risk mitigations to commodities moved from or through AI-affected regions,
6. performing adequate surveillance and developing feasible control strategies for AI, and
7. exploring options for AI control in wild bird reservoirs .

Conference participants concluded that the current worldwide highly pathogenic avian influenza event is unique, requiring reassessment of prevention, control, and eradication strategies. Participants generally agreed that there is no single answer to avian influenza prevention and control, and that multiple tools, novel approaches, and case-specific strategies are needed to deal with this global event. Because of the worldwide distribution of avian influenza and wild bird reservoirs, regional (multi-national) or perhaps global coordination of private and public entities will be necessary to detect, prevent, and control avian influenza infections.

In the short term, research is crucial to find new, more efficient ways to rapidly and humanely euthanize and dispose of the very large populations (millions) of birds housed on some modern commercial poultry farms. In the long term, participants hope resources will be made available to researchers to develop methods to enhance the immunity of wild birds and domestic poultry against avian influenza infection.

Delegates from several countries shared their experiences of recent avian influenza outbreaks, and generally agreed that stamping out policies have been largely successful and remain the best response. Vaccination has been used successfully by a few countries as a measure to control spread of infection, protect public health, and mitigate the domestic economic impact of avian influenza; however, many countries currently have policies that do not allow imports from countries that vaccinate. Several delegates, including the U.S. Chief Veterinary Officer, indicated a willingness to re-examine general prohibitions against importing products from countries that practice avian influenza vaccination, in favor of aligning with OIE standards. Zoning and

bilateral or multilateral agreements have been useful for continuity of trade, although zoning in accord with OIE standards has not been uniformly adopted. On the other hand, compartmentalization has not reaped significant benefits or achieved wide acceptance by trading partners.

Participants recommended that OIE review the Terrestrial Code chapters on avian influenza and on zoning and compartmentalization to ensure that the chapters are internally consistent, particularly with regard to the timing for an affected region to regain free status. The group also proposed that OIE develop new chapters on biosecurity standards and avian influenza-specific zoning practices; these additional chapters may provide more consistency for trading partners applying international standards to import decisions.

APHIS will prepare a report of the conference conclusions and recommendations, and distribute the report to stakeholders and the OIE.