

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)

Improving Biosecurity With Wildlife Management Practices: Protecting Food Resources

Avian influenza viruses and other pathogens that impact domestic poultry often cause little or no illness in wildlife. For this reason, apparently healthy wild birds and mammals could spread disease onto farms when they are attracted to areas with abundant food, water, and/or shelter.

You can build on and enhance your farm biosecurity by putting wildlife management practices in place. There are several nonlethal ways to make farms less welcoming to wildlife.

Wild birds and mammals are attracted to various food resources that may be found on or near farms or poultry facilities. The practices below can help you manage natural and artificial food resources at your farm to prevent wildlife from coming into direct contact with your poultry, as well as to avoid accidentally transporting wildlife fecal material and secretions into your facilities on boots, equipment, and food.

Reducing Natural Food Sources

Many natural wildlife foods, such as fruits, berries, grass seeds, flowers, and insects, are found on farms. To reduce the number of wild animals attracted to these items, remove fallen fruit and mow the grass frequently. The ideal grass height to reduce most wildlife use is 3 inches or less, although this may make it more attractive to geese. You may also want to consider removing fruit trees, shrubs, and other vegetation if they are located within 3 feet of your poultry barns. Grass, weeds, and shrubbery next to buildings provide cover and feed for wildlife.

Finally, do not feed wild birds or other wildlife on the property, including areas around houses or offices. Bird seed, suet, corn, and other feed encourages wild birds and rodents to visit often.

Preventing Access to Stored Feed

Feed structures should be located on a clean pad for easier cleaning and to reduce their attractiveness to wildlife. We recommend you keep a broom and lidded garbage container near the structures to encourage frequent inspection and cleanup of spilled feed. Even a tiny amount of feed is a meal for a wild bird or rodent. When checking the structure's pipes and connections for leaks, also look for whitewash, droppings, or other signs of wildlife activity, such as tracks or damage from chewing or scratching.



There are several nonlethal management methods for reducing wildlife's potential spread of disease on farms.



Disposing of Waste

All farms need effective waste disposal methods. Common methods are incineration, composting, and dumpsters/rendering. Unfortunately, these methods can also attract wildlife. Look for signs of wildlife getting into waste, such as digging in compost piles, whitewash, and carcass removal.

To prevent wildlife access to waste, keep carcasses and compost piles covered at all times. Covering them at the end of the day or every other day does not stop wildlife and wild birds such as gulls, crows, ravens, vultures, and eagles from scavenging. Keep trash can and dumpster lids closed and latched to prevent raccoon, feral cat, and rodent access. Carcasses being held for incineration and molded or clumped feed should also be kept in a lidded container. Do not compost or dispose of spoiled feed on the farm. Freezer units may also be used to prevent wildlife access to waste.

Recommended Actions

- Conduct a wildlife assessment at your farm. Do wild animals have access to food, water, and shelter on your site? If so, learn about and use wildlife management methods to improve your biosecurity.
- Reduce the amount of natural wildlife food sources on your property. Mow your grass and remove fallen fruit often.
- Do not feed wildlife.
- Keep areas around stored feed clean and in good working order.
- Store waste and carcasses in covered containers.
- Do not walk or drive trucks, tractors, or other equipment through areas where waterfowl or other wildlife fecal material may be present.

Please note that the lethal removal of native wildlife is regulated under Federal and State laws. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other experts do not recommend lethally removing native wild birds to prevent the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza or other diseases. Because wild birds are abundant and constantly moving, using lethal methods is not practical or environmentally sound. It is much more effective to remove sources of wildlife attraction than to manage wild animals after they have arrived on your property.

Learn More

If you have specific questions about wildlife management on your farm or need help conducting a wildlife assessment, call your nearest USDA Wildlife Services office toll free at 1-866-4USDA-VWS (1-866-487-3297).

For general information on avian influenza and emergency response, go to www.aphis.usda.gov/animal-health/aiupdates.



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