

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)

Improving Biosecurity With Wildlife Management Practices: Reducing Water Access

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.

Waterfowl, as well as other birds and mammals, are attracted to water for drinking, bathing, feeding, and loafing. The practices below can help you manage water 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.

Removing Standing Water

Even small, shallow pools of standing water, such as those found in tire ruts, can attract waterfowl and other wildlife. So grade your property to avoid pooling water. We recommend a minimum slope of half an inch per foot. You should fill and/or grade all areas where standing water is seen for more than 24 hours after a heavy rainfall. Where standing water is unavoidable, make sure workers don't walk or move equipment in or near the area. This prevents possible contamination of boots and equipment.

Managing Ponds and Basins

Wildlife are attracted to ponds, catchment basins, and manmade irrigation structures. To make these areas less desirable to most wildlife species, you may want to manage vegetation on the banks. However, this may make the area more attractive to geese. You may need to obtain a permit to manage vegetation around ponds and other water sources per the Clean Water Act. Please consult with a wildlife or wetlands professional before removing such vegetation.

Fencing can also be used to separate natural ponds or vegetation areas from active areas around poultry facilities. You can grid ponds with wires or ropes to discourage waterfowl from landing on the water. Floating a boat or bird deterrent balls on the pond and using predator decoys or other scare devices may also be effective, but the decoys should be moved frequently to prevent wildlife habituation.



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



Filtering Surface Water

Avian influenza viruses can be spread through contaminated water. Never use untreated surface water to water poultry or clean equipment, barns, or other facilities. If you must use surface water, treat the water or install filtration to remove pathogens. Test the water quality regularly to make sure the water treatment or filtration is effective.

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.
- Keep waterfowl and other wildlife off of your farm by removing standing water and preventing access to ponds and basins.
- Do not use untreated or unfiltered surface water to wet poultry or clean equipment, barns, or other facilities.
- 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-WS (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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