



! Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

Improving Biosecurity with Wildlife Management Practices: Preventing Access to Barns and Other Facilities

Avian influenza, or “bird flu,” is a respiratory disease of birds caused by influenza A viruses. Wild birds, such as ducks, gulls, and shorebirds, can carry and spread these viruses, even when they look healthy. Certain strains of avian influenza, such as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), may cause illness and death in wild birds. HPAI kills domestic poultry (such as chickens, turkeys, ducks, and geese).

You can strengthen your farm biosecurity by putting wildlife management practices in place. There are several ways to make farms less welcoming to wildlife. Wild birds and animals visit barns, silos, and other structures at farms and poultry facilities to nest, rest, or seek shelter. The practices below can help stop wildlife from nesting and living in and near your poultry facilities and coming into direct contact with your poultry. Keeping wildlife away from your farm also helps avoid accidentally transporting wildlife feces and secretions that may contain harmful viruses or bacteria into your facilities on boots, equipment, and food.

Inspect Structures

The design of some poultry facilities may either attract or deter wildlife. For example, structures with shorter eaves or no overhangs are less likely to attract nesting birds. Structures with top-vein ventilation, roof-top vents, and overhead wires may attract perching birds—allowing their feces to drop near or directly onto the barn floor. You can easily spot problem areas by looking for whitewash from bird feces on the ground below eaves or on rafters. Take time to inspect your facilities and look for structures that may attract wildlife. Biologists with Wildlife Services, a program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, can help you conduct an onsite assessment.



Plug Holes and Burrows

Plug and patch holes in building exteriors to prevent rodents and wild birds, such as European starlings, from using them for nesting or shelter. Also, check all screens and door openings regularly and repair or replace them when damaged to prevent wildlife from entering your facilities.

Concrete aprons around building side walls can deter rodents, cottontail rabbits, and other small animals from burrowing into buildings. Fill small burrows, tunnels, and other holes around structures with gravel.

A variety of wildlife damage management methods can help to reduce wildlife's potential spread of disease on farms.

Install Barriers, Netting, and Other Deterrents

Wild birds often use ledges, rafters, and eaves as roosting and nesting sites. Install barriers or other deterrents, such as repellent gel or bird spikes, to these areas.

Nylon netting or wire mesh should be tightly secured on all sides and regularly inspected for holes and wear. Properly installed and maintained 10- or 12-gauge mesh with 1-inch openings will exclude most bird species. If damaged, exclusion netting can benefit nesting birds by forming small pockets that protect their nests from predators, so be sure to inspect it regularly.

Before nesting season begins, remember to wash away, or remove old nests per Federal and State regulations. If their nests were successful, birds often return to the same nesting location year after year. Farm managers can consult with local, State, or Federal biologists to learn more about the wildlife nesting period in their area. Please note that it is unlawful to remove native wild bird nests with eggs or young in them without a permit from the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Checklist

- ✅ Conduct a wildlife assessment at your farm. Do wild animals have access to food, water, and/or shelter on your site? If so, learn about and use wildlife management methods to improve your biosecurity.
- ✅ Inspect your buildings and other structures regularly for holes, tears, and other openings that would allow wildlife access to poultry or poultry feed and equipment.
- ✅ Prevent wild birds and other wildlife from nesting, roosting, and living in or near your poultry facilities by plugging and patching holes and installing barriers and deterrents.
- ✅ Do not walk or drive trucks, tractors, or other equipment through areas where waterfowl or other wildlife feces may be present.

USDA and other experts recommend an integrated wildlife damage management approach. Some management methods that involve handling nests and eggs or the lethal removal of wildlife require specific expertise and authorizations. The lethal removal of native wildlife is regulated under Federal and State laws.



Learn More

If you have specific questions about how to manage wildlife on your farm or need help conducting a wildlife assessment, call the USDA's Wildlife Services program toll free at 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297). **For general information on avian influenza and emergency response, scan the QR code.**

