

! Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

Improving Biosecurity with Wildlife Management Practices: Protecting Food Resources

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 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 and help you avoid accidentally transporting wildlife feces and bodily fluids that may contain harmful viruses or bacteria into your facilities on boots, equipment, and food.

Prevent Access to Stored Feed

Feed structures should be located on a clean pad for easier cleaning and to make them less attractive to wildlife. Keep a broom and lidded garbage container nearby and frequently inspect and clean up 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.



Reduce 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. Grass, weeds, and shrubbery growing next to buildings provides cover and feed for wildlife. Consider removing fruit trees, shrubs, and other plants if they are located near your poultry barns.

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.

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

Dispose of Waste

All farms need effective waste disposal methods. Common methods include incineration, composting, and dumpsters or rendering, all of which may also attract wildlife. Look for signs of wildlife getting into waste, such as digging in compost piles, whitewash, and movement of carcasses.

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 lidded containers. Do not compost or dispose of spoiled feed on the farm. Freezer units may also be used to prevent wildlife access to waste.



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.
- ✅ 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 feces may be present.



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.



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.