Wildlife Services

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

Improving Biosecurity with Wildlife Management Practices: Reducing Water Access

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.

Waterfowl, as well as other birds and animals, are attracted to water for drinking, bathing, feeding, and loafing. The practices below can help manage water resources at your farm to prevent wildlife from coming into direct contact with your poultry. They can also help avoid accidental transport of wildlife feces and bodily fluids that may contain harmful viruses or bacteria into facilities on boots, equipment, and food.

Remove Standing Water

Even small, shallow pools of standing water, such as those found in tire ruts, can attract waterfowl and other wildlife. Consider grading 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.



Manage Ponds and Basins

Wildlife is attracted to ponds, catchment basins, and irrigation structures. To make these areas less desirable to most wildlife species, cut back or remove plants growing on the banks. However, this may make the area more attractive to geese. Please consult with a wildlife or wetlands professional before removing plants around ponds to identify the best solution for your situation and determine whether you need a permit per the Clean Water Act.

You can also use fencing to separate natural ponds or vegetation areas from active areas around poultry facilities. Gridding ponds with wires or ropes may discourage waterfowl from landing on the water.

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

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Floating a boat or bird deterrent balls on ponds and using predator decoys or other scare devices may also be effective, but decoys should be moved frequently so birds and animals don't become used to them.

Filter Surface Water

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

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