

Avian Influenza and Pandemic Preparedness A Planning Resource For The Grocery Industry

prepared by:
The Food Marketing Institute
March, 2006



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A number of organizations have contributed their time and talent to this document, but one company deserves special recognition. Alex Lee, Inc., Hickory, North Carolina, has very generously shared with us their own internal readiness paper that has served as the basic framework for this document and its recommendations. They began with background material provided by the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, Dr. Michael Osterholm, Director. A task force of 16 professionals representing all functional areas then developed a plan specifically for the grocery industry. Without their pioneering work, this Planning Resource Document would not have been possible.

We would also like to express our appreciation to those many individuals who gave generously of their time and talents to review this document and give us suggestions that have greatly improved the final product. In particular, we would extend our special thanks to:

- FMI's Food Protection Committee

- Dr. Linda Hawes Clever, M.D., M.A.C.P.
Director of Occupational Health
California Pacific Medical Center
San Francisco, CA

- Dr. Michela T. Catalano, M.D.
Director of Employees' Health Services
Department of Medicine and Infectious Diseases
Montifiore Hospital and Medical Center
Bronx, NY

- Dr. Joe Mac Regenstein, PhD
Professor of Food Science
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY

PREFACE

The purpose of this document is to help the industry prepare for the possibility of an influenza pandemic (a global, lethal contagion as opposed to our more typical annual flu season). We are not intending to be alarmist nor are we predicting with any degree of certainty that a pandemic is on the way. However, global influenza pandemics have appeared with some regularity throughout history. In the 20th century, there were pandemics in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Based on this cycle, many scientists believe that a new lethal version of human influenza is likely within the foreseeable future either from a mutated version of the current avian influenza sweeping the globe or from some other novel viral mutation.

Even if the current avian outbreak does not jump to a form easily transmissible among humans, the economic devastation it is already causing deserves our attention especially should it arrive in North America. The World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that: “The lethal strain of bird flu (H5N1) poses a greater challenge to the world than any infectious disease, including AIDS, and has cost 300 million farmers more than \$10 billion in its spread through poultry around the world.”

WHO went on to say that if this version of bird flu mutates to become human transmissible, it could potentially cause more deaths than those from any other infectious disease. “Because the H5N1 virus is airborne, it is easier to transmit and much more contagious than HIV/AIDS.” Dr. Mike Ryan, WHO’s director of epidemic and pandemic alert and response program says: “We truly feel that this present threat, and any other [influenza pandemic] threat like it, is likely to stretch our global systems to the point of collapse.”

This threat is so significant that it deserves to be understood and some degree of contingency planning should be carried out by every company in the industry. That’s what this document is all about. It is specifically designed to help supermarket retailers, and the wholesalers and suppliers who serve them, undertake the necessary contingency planning to prepare for a pandemic. As you read through this, we would stress that should such an event occur, there will not be enough time to prepare after the crisis arrives. *This threat will move with a speed that demands advance planning.*

Should we face an actual pandemic, the Food Marketing Institute is prepared to serve as a timely, ongoing source of information and advice. In addition to the ways you can access the resources that we lay out in this paper, FMI is working with government agencies to help them understand our industry’s special needs during an outbreak. Included among the priorities we are working on are the need for the Department of Transportation (DOT) to relax their rules and regulations during a pandemic emergency, the need for the government to provide priority medical supplies to food workers, and the need to coordinate government/business messages to consumers to help all of us avoid creating needless panic among shoppers.

As you work through your own contingency planning process, we invite you to share your comments and suggestions with us to improve our ongoing efforts to help the entire industry prepare for this or any other widespread health emergencies.

Avian Influenza

A Planning Resource for the Grocery Industry

The Food Marketing Institute continues to monitor the progress of Avian Influenza (H5N1 Bird Flu) around the world. The recent jump of this disease beyond Asia into Europe and then into Africa indicates that the current control measures have not stopped its spread. As a result, every organization needs to begin thinking about steps to improve readiness. To help in that process, we are providing this resource document as a starting point for your own planning process. This is not a document that sits on the shelf until a pandemic erupts. It is a resource to help you develop your own action plans well in advance of the actual need.

Not every organization will implement all of these recommendations and certainly not all at once. However, you should review this document to determine your own priorities and timetable. If a pandemic actually erupts, it will be too late to start planning your response.

The Evolving Situation

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on February 13, 2006 that: *“The confirmation of H5N1 avian influenza in poultry in Africa is a cause for great concern and demands immediate action. This latest outbreak confirms that no country is immune to H5N1.”* Their immediate concern is that the disease is being spread by migratory birds and this ultimately puts every country at risk. There are as yet no cases of birds infected with H5N1 in the United States and the poultry industry here is already taking aggressive preventive action. Still, the risk is real and it’s prudent to consider what it might mean to our industry should it spread here.

So far, there is no evidence that this disease can be commonly spread from human to human. The H5N1 virus has circulated widely in southern China for over a decade. This means that there has been ample opportunity for the virus to mutate into a form easily transmissible among humans, but as yet it has not. Humans can contract the disease directly from infected birds (primarily chickens or ducks) but it cannot yet be commonly passed from human to human. There is as yet no consensus that it will ever make that jump. But it could happen, or some other novel virus could become transmissible by humans leading to what is known as a pandemic.

Even if the disease never manifests itself in a form transmitted by humans, arrival among poultry in North America would still have a considerable impact on the grocery industry.

Is There a Livestock Risk Beyond Poultry?

Yes, potentially there is and you should at least know about the possibility.

All type A influenza originates in birds. One common way an avian virus mutates into human-transmissible form is for bird flu to infect a host who is simultaneously infected with human influenza. The bird version then has the potential to mix with the human flu virus and recombine into a human transmissible form. In other words, if a human catches avian influenza from an infected bird and has human flu at the same time, the avian virus has a chance to morph (reassort) into a new form capable of being spread from human to human.

This gene reassortment can also occur in hogs. Hogs have the unique capability of being able to contract both bird flu and human flu. As a result, they are a common incubator for the mutation of pandemic viruses. If H5N1 mutates into a human-transmissible form spontaneously or through the reassortment process just described, or if some other novel virus should appear, it is possible that the role of hogs in this or another country could also surface, provoking a reaction from consumers.

Why Is There So Much Concern About A Flu Pandemic?

Influenza pandemics (as opposed to our normal annual flu season) have appeared 10 times in the last 300 years, the last in 1968. When they have made the jump to human transmissible forms, they have often killed with speed and ferocity. The worst recorded case was our last major outbreak in 1918 (commonly known as the Spanish flu) caused by the H1N1 strain. This particular strain is believed to have emerged in the U. S. and spread rapidly throughout the world.

Contrary to our expectations that a pandemic would unfold slowly, 1918-19 proved that we may not have the luxury of time. In just 12 weeks in the fall of 1918, it is estimated that in excess of 5 percent of all the people in the world died. Adjusting for our larger population today, a comparable figure would be in excess of 73 million deaths with roughly two million of those in the U.S. Before it was over, it is thought that between 8 and 10 percent of the world's young adults were killed during the 1918 outbreak, two-thirds of them in just 24 weeks—far too quickly for the medical community to react effectively. Experts estimate that today we would have only between 20 and 30 days from first emergence of a human transmissible form to a full pandemic. This means that it is highly unlikely that vaccines would be developed in time to be widely effective during the main period of contagion.

On the plus side, today we have remarkably more sophisticated medical science available to us, an active monitoring system is already in place, and more resources are already being devoted to preparedness. But there are points on the minus side as well. Today more people have compromised immune systems, more people travel worldwide, more people eat meals away from home in large groups, cost cutting in health care means that we now have fewer hospital beds per capita than 50 years ago, and our vaccine production facilities are dwindling with more than half of our annual flu vaccines produced overseas. Even a much less potent virus than the 1918 version would still have an enormous impact on your grocery shoppers, your associates, and your suppliers.

Monitoring the Situation

FMI will continue to monitor the progress of H5N1 avian influenza or any other highly contagious disease and post the most current information on our Website. You can find this by clicking on the Avian Influenza link on <http://www.fmi.org/>. This page will maintain a list of Frequently Asked Questions and links to other useful sites, particularly the official sites of government regulatory and information agencies.

Recommendations

Recommendations in each section of this document are of two types:

- ✓ Key Recommendations, and
- Secondary Recommendations.

Overview

Should H5N1 become transmissible from human to human, it's highly likely that the resulting spread through the population will produce immediate and profound impacts. Once this happens anywhere in the world, previous influenza outbreaks have shown that it spreads quickly across regions. Any jump to transmissible form should trigger a response plan no matter where it occurs.

Even though the primary vehicle for transmission at that point would be person-to-person, consumers may also see this as a food safety issue because of its animal origins. Demand for poultry and eggs (and perhaps pork) could drop dramatically and immediately, whether rational or not. Consumers would be expected to resist leaving their homes. Grocers would then see their business shift to fewer visits with increased basket size. Demand for Internet shopping, self-checkout, and home delivery could spike. Consumers could also shy away from products imported from the countries where the pandemic is perceived to have originated or where outbreaks are widespread.

Independent grocers will face the same issues as large chains, but with fewer resources. Of particular concern to their business survival would be the death or prolonged illness of one or more family members key to the business. We should expect that a large number of independent grocers will look to their suppliers and wholesalers for help.

Influenza has often been characterized as a "disease of crowds." We can expect that advice will be given to the general public to avoid them. Restaurants should expect to see their business evaporate for some considerable period of time. Wholesalers with food service customers (especially sit-down restaurants) may find it difficult for many of those businesses to survive. The receivables balances of foodservice customers would then become a big issue for those wholesalers. At the height of a pandemic, we can expect emergency health care facilities to pop up in buildings that will be lacking food preparation facilities because there is simply not enough surge capacity in our hospitals to accommodate those needing care during a full-scale outbreak.

The response of company associates is more difficult to predict, but companies should begin to plan to operate with significant staff shortages. Many part-time and lower-paid associates could choose not to report to their jobs if they perceive the risk being greater than the compensation. The demands placed on the Human Resources function will be huge as many traditional policies and practices become instantly obsolete.

On the vendor side, disruptions to the supply chain and product shortages are highly likely. Initially, given a likely shortage of drivers, fuel shortages are probable. Given time, fuel costs could actually drop if the pandemic's impact on China's economy is severe and the travel demand for gasoline shrinks.

Previous influenza outbreaks have occurred in waves spreading over many months. Often an initial contagion occurs followed by a more severe, more lethal, variation as the virus continues to mutate and adapt with perhaps even a third wave to follow this separated by a few weeks or even months. As a result, business continuity plans must be geared for prolonged emergency periods. Outbreaks are also likely to occur simultaneously in several areas, making normal supply "work arounds" inadequate. It should also be expected that disruptions could very well impact major areas of the infrastructure such as transportation, power, fuel supplies, communications, water systems and even local police, fire and medical services. It is also possible that some regions could actually come under quarantine, although the infections would most probably spread so rapidly that this tactic is not likely to be widespread or prolonged.

Key Business Continuity Recommendations

- ✓ As a framework for the key planning recommendations set out in the pages to follow, establish a set of “trigger points” that can be activated as the pandemic spreads. Each trigger point needs to have a set of well-defined checklists with clear cut responsibilities. Trigger points might be structured as follows (these will not necessarily unfold in sequence):
 - Phase One—No human outbreak, no birds affected in North America. Planning only.
 - Phase Two—H5N1 Avian Influenza infects birds in North America. Information on what this means should be communicated to consumers. Preparations are made for poultry sales to drop. FMI will coordinate with the medical community, government agencies, and trade groups such as the National Chicken Council to help craft consumer messages.
 - Phase Three—Human-to-human transmission occurs in a foreign location. Planning is accelerated, briefings are held for your key staff, travel to the outbreak region(s) is stopped. Preparations are made for stocking up on medications and other flu-related supplies identified as likely to be in high demand by consumers. Daily monitoring of key information Websites is assigned to a coordinator. FMI begins daily updates on our Website www.fmi.org.
 - Phase Four—Isolated human outbreaks in the United States. Preparation is made for splitting key head office staff into segregated groups as appropriate or possible. Preparations are made for enhanced communications with all associates and with consumers as necessary. Any government quarantines are monitored carefully.
 - Phase Five—Human outbreak in the company’s operating area(s). Full implementation of all contingency plans is set in motion.
 - Phase Six—The initial wave of contagion has passed but secondary waves are yet possible, even likely. Protective measures are slowly and selectively relaxed until the nation moves back into Phase Five or returns to Phase One.
- ✓ Analyze your product lists to anticipate likely demand shifts during a pandemic. Identify “core” items and create emergency purchase orders that can be executed when the appropriate trigger point is invoked. Identify emergency substitution rules that can be implemented to keep products on the shelf. Identify items that should be offered in case quantities and identify foodservice products that should be sold at retail. To the extent possible, begin discussions with your vendors and wholesalers to obtain appropriate emergency commitments. Backup strategies to meet product shortages should also be discussed.
- ✓ Implement a company-wide analysis of “essential” and “nonessential” job functions during a pandemic. Develop plans to appropriately shift resources. Consider cross-training and education that might be appropriate for your company.
- ✓ Develop an emergency chain of command so that leadership can be maintained and clearly communicated even if key individuals should become ill.
- ✓ Develop emergency communications mechanisms that will be needed during a pandemic. This includes communications to associates and customers.
- ✓ Design and develop a personnel database that will be needed to locate and communicate with your key associates and their families. Update regularly. Provide remote access for key personnel needing to make workforce decisions.

- ✓ Consider developing or scaling up Internet ordering or shop-by-phone options.
- ✓ Develop essential contacts and relationships with local officials. Understand and document which agencies will be making specific decisions vital to your continued operations.
- ✓ Begin working with your Health Plan Administrator to develop emergency health care procedures.
- ✓ Research the potential to use any excess capacity in restaurants in your area to serve the requirements of emergency health care facilities in locations without kitchens. Perhaps this is a service activity you could provide to the degree that you have the personnel available.

Summary

You should designate an Emergency Response Team to review and discuss these key recommendations and reach consensus on which recommendations deserve attention for your particular company. From this, develop a project plan and assign the necessary resources to make it happen. Should a pandemic strike, it is very clear that this kind of preparation will be essential for your business survival. Historic patterns suggest that absenteeism among associates might be as high as 20% to 30% due to actual illness with another 10% out to care for family members. Individual departments or specific geographic areas could see even higher rates. The magnitude of dealing with this challenge should be readily apparent to everyone in the industry.

Dealing With Consumers

Given the massive media coverage a pandemic would generate, we should anticipate some degree of overreaction and irrational behavior, especially in the first two or three months. It will take some considerable time for consumers to adjust to the new realities of life during a pandemic.

During the initial months we should anticipate a number of consumer behavioral shifts:

- Avoidance of dining out along with shifting to more meals at home, especially where schools might be closed.
- Consolidation of trips to the store by purchasing much larger quantities of products in fewer visits.
- Preference towards non-perishable and prepackaged goods.
- Spike in demand for certain HBC/anti-bacterial products (whether or not they are effective).
- Demand for masks and gloves that can be purchased for personal use.
- Demand to see food handlers wearing masks and gloves.
- Demand to see anti-bacterial wipes in key store locations (whether effective or not).
- Strong interest in Internet or phone ordering for customer pickup or delivery.
- Strong interest in self-checkout avoiding cashiers.
- Avoidance of non-essential retail stores.
- An early attempt to stockpile products (similar to Y2K experience).
- Strong desire to get accurate information.
- Avoidance of products made outside the United States if that is where the jump to human-transmissible form of the influenza is believed to have occurred.
- Possible demand for expanded country-of-origin information and/or “USA Only” sections throughout the store.

Key Recommendations for Dealing With Consumers

- ✓ Develop a detailed plan that identifies the products that should be carried during the pandemic and those non-essential products that could be scaled back to provide the space needed for demand-spike items.
- ✓ Prepare to deliver common sense health recommendations to consumers. Accurate and timely information for local customers can help prevent panic. This would include advice on the importance of hand washing, cough/sneeze hygiene, advice on how to distinguish between the new contagion and common colds or the more traditional annual flu. Monitor FMI’s recommendations on our Website as they are continuously updated.
- ✓ Prepare to ramp up Internet shopping or shop-by-phone where this is feasible. This might involve delivery or might function with consumer pickup. Where this is not feasible, prepare to communicate with customers the steps you are taking in the store to ensure their safety.
- ✓ Take steps to ensure that any protective steps you decide to implement (masks, gloves, etc.) aren’t perceived by consumers as reflecting a higher degree of risk in your operations versus a competitor slow to react. You will need to communicate any changes clearly to your shoppers and explain that these steps are taken to help protect their health.

- Prepare to ramp up self checkout where it is available. Customers may wish to minimize contacts with cashiers for some period of time whether rational or not.
- Identify resources in your area that could provide home delivery options as an extension to Internet or phone shopping. Are there foodservice workers who could be out of a job for a period of time who could do this for you?
- Consider the possibility of reducing store operating hours if staffing becomes difficult.
- Develop a plan to identify foodservice packs of items from your wholesaler or your warehouses that could be moved to retail to meet the need for bulk buying.
- Prepare to educate consumers on why any visible changes you make are appropriate. Provide up-to-date messages for consumers that answer the critical question: “What are you doing to protect me?”
- Explore the potential impact of new people taking on shopping duties who are not familiar with your store layout or procedures (spouses shopping for sick partners, shift to younger shoppers now at home).
- Consider whether it may be necessary to limit purchases of key high-demand products during any initial panic. This would be a very difficult decision for any grocer or wholesaler and it deserves to be thought about well in advance.

Dealing with Associates

In any lethal pandemic, it is a reality that some associates will become ill, perhaps even in significant numbers, and some will die. Others will need to deal with sick family members. In addition to the illness itself, other factors such as school closings will place additional demands and stress on your associates. For unionized companies, your union leaders will need to be educated on the consequences of a pandemic and the changes that you believe will be essential.

Although outbreaks will likely occur over a 12 month period, perhaps even longer, there will be inconsistent peaks and valleys (“waves”). For planning purposes, many companies choose to assume that, at times, some departments may need to operate at 50% staffing.

Companies should expect to be particularly hard hit with respect to their part-time and lower-paid positions. For example, it is reasonable to conclude that many two-income households will decide that the risk of exposure for all those currently working outweighs the incremental income. This could hit store operations particularly hard.

Associates facing the natural conflict between the need to earn money and the need to protect themselves and their families will react in a wide variety of ways:

- Some associates could simply not show up.
- Some associates will be highly motivated to remain at work as a way to earn money, protect their families from exposure and serve the company.
- Some associates could want to work even though they exhibit symptoms of the flu.
- Some associates could decline health care for fear of contracting the flu at the doctor’s office.
- Some associates could decline to drive into certain geographies hard hit by the virus.
- Some associates may demand gloves, masks, etc. for themselves, especially those who staff your stores.

Key Recommendations for Dealing with Associates

- ✓ Many current employment policies are likely to become instantly obsolete during a pandemic. A thorough review of employment issues and preparation of emergency procedures must be made in advance.
- ✓ In advance of any pandemic, companies should ask each department to determine which functions would be critical during a pandemic and which functions would not.
- ✓ Identify critical functions that would be at risk if a significant percentage of those associates become ill at the same time. In particular, look for areas in which you are only 2-deep or 3-deep. Implement appropriate cross-training programs in advance of the pandemic to the extent this is possible for your company.
- ✓ Develop a “best practices” plan to minimize the odds of spreading the flu. This could include measures such as minimizing group meetings and communicating via email and voice-only where possible. Provide information on home precautions and home care for ill family members. The Websites identified will be a source for this information.
- ✓ Develop a plan for N95 masks that can be used by your associates including training in their use. Determine how many should be stockpiled and how they should be rolled out.

- ✓ Strong reminders should be given to associates not to report for work if they even think they or any family member may be contagious. In the event of a serious local outbreak, some companies are making plans to screen associates when they arrive for high temperatures or signs of excessive coughing or sneezing (although people may be highly contagious for several days before they exhibit symptoms). Any screening procedures should be cleared in advance with your attorneys and Human Resources experts.
- ✓ In advance of a pandemic, identify jobs that will likely face critical shortages (e.g. cashiers, truck drivers) and those jobs that will likely be in surplus (e.g. foodservice workers).
- ✓ Develop an emergency plan for reallocating associates to other functions where the need is greatest. Thought must be given to the risk of other organizations attempting to lure away key staff people such as your drivers or your wholesaler's drivers.
- ✓ Develop a plan specific to your own drivers or ask your wholesaler to do this for their own fleet. Since there is already a driver shortage, it is hard to predict how this will play out. It probably makes sense to consider the options (shift foodservice drivers to grocery delivery, partner with organizations that will have surplus drivers).
- ✓ Develop a plan for communicating with associates during the pandemic both at work and at home. Consider how the Internet or call centers could simplify this task.
- ✓ There will be the strong need to build a personnel database for tracking critical information relating to the flu. During a pandemic, it will be crucial to know which associates are currently sick; which have recovered and may have some degree of immunity; which have lost family members; which have EMT, paramedic, or other health care training; etc.
- ✓ Start a dialog with your healthcare administrator to develop emergency plans and procedures. This should include careful attention to situations in which it is not possible for associates to get the healthcare services they need.
- ✓ Many aspects of a pandemic will generate significant employment-related costs. This includes direct medical costs, paid sick time, meeting special personnel needs, etc. An examination of all of these costs is appropriate along with discussions about how your organization could sustain them.
- ✓ Previous outbreaks point to the need to prepare for associates who may report to work feeling fine but suddenly become severely ill. Shoppers might even collapse in the store. Train personnel as to how they should lend assistance if this occurs, including any policies you may develop on the use of masks, gowns, etc. During prolonged outbreaks, associates who have been ill and recovered may be encouraged to volunteer for assistance since they will already possess some degree of immunity. Some thought might also be given to providing changes of clothes for those who have assisted the suddenly ill.
- ✓ Talk with your attorney about the legal ramifications of the steps you plan to take during a pandemic and implement appropriate precautions that may be necessary to minimize your exposure.
 - Prepare to make hygiene supplies such as hand sanitizers, tissues, and sufficient waste baskets or special trash receptacles with hands-free lids for disposing of tissues available in key locations.

- For jobs that are likely to be in short supply (cashiers, lift operators, drivers, etc.) examine the opportunity to provide emergency backup. This may be accomplished either through cross-training or partnering with other organizations that have a surplus supply of skilled labor during the outbreak.
- For large organizations, and even for some small ones, develop a plan to shift appropriate jobs to home offices and the necessary procedures to perform business process in such a distributed fashion. For those jobs that can be adequately performed from home, identify necessary hardware, software, and connectivity requirements to support the plan. This should also consider what investments might need to be made in advance of the pandemic (PC's, broadband access, etc.).
- If you offer meals to associates, modify cafeteria or break room practices, as appropriate, to minimize the chance of spreading the virus. Follow the advice of agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on appropriate hygiene practices. The FMI Website will provide the necessary links.
- In advance of a pandemic, implement 100% direct payroll deposit to the extent possible. This will be helpful in eliminating the physical distribution and handling of paychecks.
- For those with headquarters staff, most of you assign people in those departments to contiguous office space. Consider the value of moving people around, at least during an emergency, so that a part of a building hard hit by the virus would not expose everyone in a single department at the same time. Consider whether this will require some equipment or files to be propositioned for ease of access.
- As appropriate, have computer-based-training (CBT) readily available to simplify the task of assigning associates to new tasks.
- Develop a plan to staff Human Resources. Many HR functions will be under extreme pressure whether it's one person in a small company or an entire department in a large one. Incremental resources to handle the work will likely be needed. This plan should include halting all non-essential HR functions.
- Develop a plan for implementing an emergency call center or limited-access Website that associates can contact for information and special needs.
- Consider the need to begin familiarizing associates with pandemics before an actual emergency arises. This needs to weigh the value of providing insight into the potential issues against the fear of needlessly alarming associates. Some articles in the company newsletter may be appropriate to let people know you are monitoring the situation and preparing to deal with it should the need ever arise.
- In the event of major fuel shortages caused by the interruption to international trade or the shortage of tanker truck drivers, develop a plan to help associates get to work. Consider whether it might be possible to help associates avoid mass transit.
- Consider the idea of having special "associates only" hours at retail stores to ensure that your staff has access to the necessities. This might be necessary to encourage key associates to continue to work.
- Develop a plan to provide appropriate additional security for associates. For example, drivers and store personnel could be placed at risk if there is panic during a pandemic.

Key Human Resources Recommendations

Based on the numerous employment issues discussed above, it is reasonable to conclude that the Human Resources Department would come under severe strain from the incremental work. Some HR functions can be suspended (example: benefits statements) but the net outcome will undoubtedly be a significantly increased workload.

- ✓ Develop an emergency set of procedures that can be used in a crisis. This should include: streamlined hiring policies, short term disability practices, time off policy, emergency personnel assistance policies, medical policies, death-in-family policy, miscellaneous crisis policies, paycheck distribution. Review with legal counsel.
- Establish a Call Center or limited-access Website for Associates.
- Identify sources for supplemental HR resources. Some duties or functions may be allocated internally, for others outside resources may be necessary.
- Address liability and insurance issues for temporary personnel who might be brought in to fill special needs—surplus foodservice workers, for example. Review your total insurance coverage to assess issues that might arise should you need to actually implement your action plans.

Key Retail Store Recommendations

Reactions from consumers and associates will have a strong impact on retail operations. Both groups will place new demands on the retail store.

- ✓ Prepare for a run on products consumers will use to stock up for a prolonged stay in their homes. For those stores with pharmacies, prepare for shoppers to stock up on essential medications and supplies, items such as insulin, heart medications, essential prescriptions, respirators, gloves, masks, antibacterial hand soaps, etc.
- ✓ Develop plans to deal with consumer demands for your store associates to take special precautions (masks, gloves, cleaning procedures, etc.).
- ✓ Identify critical functions and services that would create store vulnerabilities if disrupted. Develop appropriate plans to minimize those risks.
- ✓ Develop plans to deal with product and labor shortages. This may include restricting store hours. In some cases, it may be necessary for multi-store operators to consolidate and close some stores.
 - Develop emergency plans to minimize unnecessary vendor time on the sales floor.
 - Develop emergency policies to minimize unnecessary retail visits from non-store personnel. This would include restricting repair and maintenance of equipment to essential work.
 - Revise receiving procedures to minimize contact between drivers and receivers.
 - Consider shifting store duties so that more work is performed during non-peak hours to minimize contact between consumers and associates.
 - Consider how you could meet a consumer demand for home delivery. Can you partner with other organizations to meet this need? How would you find and recruit food service associates temporarily out of a job?
 - Develop a cash handling strategy to deal with the potential that your armored security service could be disrupted.

Key Distribution Center and Transportation Recommendations

These are items for those who operate their own distribution centers to consider or for independent grocers to discuss with their wholesalers.

- ✓ Coordinate with your buying departments or retail customers to learn about their plans to “bulk up” on core items so that facilities can be secured for emergency storage. It is important that the core items be identified well in advance of any pandemic.
- ✓ Develop emergency check-in and receiving procedures to minimize contact between drivers and warehouse personnel.
- ✓ Develop emergency store delivery procedures to minimize contact with receivers.
 - Increase security for warehouses and vehicles.
 - Develop emergency guidelines for any lumpers you may use to lessen the chance of spreading the virus.
 - Develop alternative routing plans that reduce the number of deliveries.
 - Develop plans to minimize the potential for a fuel shortage that could occur during an initial panic period.
 - Develop backup plans to serve routes should some drivers decline to travel into areas they perceive as high risk.
 - Develop cooperative arrangements with other distributors to keep the food supply chain functioning.
 - Consider using any excess distribution capacity to help in other emergency areas (for example, medical supplies).
 - Since drivers for the delivery of machine parts could be in short supply, or some foreign factories could be shut down, consider appropriate plans to have an adequate inventory of critical parts to keep the fleet and other equipment running.
 - Develop relaxed product substitution rules such that products continue to flow to the shelves. These will need to be well communicated and well understood.

Key Product Supplier Recommendations

Upstream manufacturers and vendors will certainly be facing the same set of issues faced by grocers. It should be noted that suppliers will face shortages from their suppliers as well. Even obscure shortages, such as packaging material, would negatively impact the suppliers' ability to provide products. It is also possible that normal terms of trade could be changed with little or no notice. These and other issues are well worth thinking about in advance. You or your wholesaler should be thinking about having these discussions with your suppliers.

- ✓ Identify core items that will be critical to the food supply during any pandemic.
- ✓ Develop pandemic trigger points and procedures. When a trigger point is activated, have a ready set of purchase orders for the core items ready for instant release.
- Negotiate with key vendors, as appropriate, to attempt to gain reasonable commitments.
- Identify alternative/backup suppliers for core items to the extent possible, and develop a plan to shift demand to these suppliers should it become necessary.
- Develop emergency product substitution rules.
- Recognizing that international and national distribution may be disrupted, perform a geographic vendor analysis to examine ways you could shift to more local or regional supply sources in an emergency.
- Consider a potential for consumer avoidance of products produced in the areas where the human-transmissible form of the disease is thought to have developed or where high levels of illness may be occurring.
- Consider assistance that you might be able to provide to key vendors that are struggling for survival. For example, if the demand for chicken should plunge, how could you help communicate the proper information to the public to calm irrational fears?
- Develop a plan to coordinate backhaul strategies to help address shortages. Consider alternative pickup locations that may be used in the event certain locations are more severely impacted.

Dealing with the Media

In the past 300 years there have been 10 documented pandemics. However, any new outbreak would be the first pandemic since the advent of the 24/7 cable news network. There is no doubt this will result in media saturation should actual fatalities begin to occur.

The initial result could well be consumer overreaction. Our industry will need to be prepared for both the reality of the situation as well as the many false perceptions that will circulate. It will be very important for the industry to respond to the media quickly, accurately, and carefully.

Key Media Recommendations

- ✓ Include an executive who understands the news media on your crisis planning team.
- ✓ Prepare a media point person who is well versed with the H5N1 issue. Some companies may have a staff person or department that can do this; others will choose to rely on FMI to fill this role. FMI will be prepared make statements and answer those questions not specific to individual companies.
- ✓ During the pandemic, establish a daily process to stay abreast of recent developments by checking with trusted sources. Several Internet resource sites including FMI have already been identified in this paper.
- ✓ In communicating with the media, be careful to restrict the content of your statements to fully verified facts. Do not speculate, make off-the-record statements or issue numbers that are not fully verified. Also, be especially careful not to release information about specific individuals until the people named or their families have cleared that information.
 - Compile a call list for use in sending out messages efficiently. This should include the wire services and broadcast outlets should you need to get a message out the same day of release.
 - Re-emphasize to all associates the procedures to follow if they are approached by the media. For most of you, this will be instructions to take the name of the reporter followed by an offer to put your designated spokesperson in touch. Everyone should understand that casual, flip, or offhand remarks can lead to devastating consequences for the company.
 - After the crisis, thank everyone who helped you through the process.

Other Considerations

As extensive as this document may seem, there are many other areas that any operator could identify. For example, the need for additional security in key areas should there be a public panic is obvious. This is not intended to be an exhaustive response blueprint, but it's a good framework for developing your own action plan that can be modified or supplemented as you gain experience with the process.

APPENDIX

Although the primary threat addressed in this document is a new human influenza pandemic, the animal impact of avian influenza affecting primarily wild birds and commercial poultry has already surfaced in most of the world outside of the Americas. Because of the almost daily headlines about the continued spread among the world's bird population, it is possible you may already be getting questions about whether it's safe to continue to eat poultry and poultry products. In infected countries, poultry consumption has dropped from 20 to 50 percent as a result of this fear.

In March, 2006, Dr. David Nabarro, coordinator of the United Nations project to contain the spread of bird flu, made the following statements: "The virulent H5N1 strain of bird flu could reach the Americas in six to 12 months or even sooner as infected wild birds migrate toward the Arctic and Alaska. Some infected birds will then likely move south in the fall on a migratory route to North and South America." He added: "It is certainly within the next six to 12 months, [a]nd who knows . . . it could be earlier."

Should bird flu actually be detected among wild birds or domestic poultry in North America, you should expect both associates and customers to raise the same question—Is poultry still safe to eat? Here's what the World Health Organization (WHO) is saying as of March, 2006 about the safety of eating poultry and poultry products, even from infected birds. This information is taken from the WHO link on the FMI Website. FMI will maintain continuous updates on our Website and you should check for the most recent information should you need to make a statement on this issue.

Is it safe to eat poultry and poultry products?

Avian influenza is not transmitted through cooked food. To date, no evidence indicates that anyone has become infected following the consumption of properly cooked poultry or poultry products, even when these foods were contaminated with the H5N1 virus.

In areas experiencing outbreaks, poultry and poultry products can also be safely consumed provided these items are properly cooked and properly handled during food preparation. The H5N1 virus is sensitive to heat. Normal temperatures used for cooking will kill the virus. Consumers need to be sure that all parts of the poultry are fully cooked (no "pink" parts) and that eggs, too, are properly cooked (no "runny" yolks).

Consumers should [as always] also be aware of the risk of cross-contamination. Juices from raw poultry and poultry products should never be allowed, during food preparation, to touch or mix with items eaten raw. When handling raw poultry or raw poultry products, persons involved in food preparation should wash their hands thoroughly and clean and disinfect surfaces in contact with the poultry products. Soap and hot water are sufficient for this purpose.

Source: World Health Organization—Avian Influenza Frequently Asked Questions
As taken from the link to Avian Influenza on the FMI Website: <http://www.fmi.org/>



655 15th Street, NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC 20005
www.fmi.org
202.452.8444

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