Monthly Avian Surveillance Reports Available Online

The newly emerged highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) subtype H5N1 has infected domestic poultry and wild birds in Asia, Europe and Africa, and has caused more than 150 human deaths. Currently, H5N1 avian influenza is not present in the United States, but its recent emergence in other countries has elevated the risk of introduction of this pathogenic strain to U.S. domestic poultry and wild birds.

Due to heightened animal and human health concerns, the poultry industry and State and Federal animal health regulatory agencies are making concerted efforts to increase biosecurity measures and conduct extensive surveillance to prevent, rapidly detect, and control HPAI as well as H5/H7 low pathogenicity avian influenza (LPAI) in commercial poultry, live bird markets, and poultry raised in non-confinement operations.

Surveillance is an important part of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) mission to ensure animal health, improve agricultural productivity and competitiveness, and contribute to the national economy and public health. Throughout the past 2 years, APHIS-Veterinary Services (VS) has worked closely with industry partners, States and other agencies to develop enhanced surveillance for avian influenza. These surveillance programs assure citizens and international trading partners that the U.S. commercial poultry industry is providing a safe food supply.

VS collaborates with States and the commercial industry to monitor and test domestic poultry and wild birds to detect the occurrence of avian influenza. One of these industry partners is the National Chicken Council (NCC), which represents the U.S. broiler industry and conducts rigorous testing for AI. The NCC Avian Influenza Monitoring Plan focuses on extensive private laboratory testing in which every participating company tests all broiler flocks before slaughter; this exceeds the minimum national standards established by USDA for AI surveillance. The NCC participating companies represent 98 percent of the U.S. broiler production.

The National Animal Health Surveillance System (NAHSS) plays a key role in disseminating surveillance information via Web-based reporting. VS collaborates with the NCC to maintain secure data reporting systems that allow NCC testing data to be used in national avian influenza surveillance. The surveillance information provided on the NAHSS Poultry Monitoring and Surveillance Web site (www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/nahss/poultry/) provides monthly reports and maps that summarize avian influenza testing efforts in meat-type chickens.

The NCC industry partners enter their monthly testing data via a secure Web site into the national Avian Health Database System (AVHS) that was developed by the VS Application and Information Management (AIM) group at the Centers for Epidemiology and Animal Health (CEAH). Monthly and cumulative reports provide the number of meat-type chicken flocks tested by month in each State. Monthly and cumulative maps provide an overview of where flock testing is occurring. As expected, the maps show that flock testing is concentrated in areas of the United States where the meat-type chicken industry is concentrated. The National Surveillance Unit develops the monthly data reports, and maps are created cooperatively with CEAH's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) unit and multiple partners at CEAH including the AIM unit.

The NCC confirms all monthly reports and maps prior to posting to the Web. To provide adequate time for industry reporting and confirmation, the monthly reports and maps are lagged by about six weeks. The Web-based reports are intended to provide an overview of the amount and location of avian influenza surveillance testing in the broiler industry. However, this site is not intended to provide emergency information in the event that an H5 or H7 AI virus subtype is found; that information would be provided on the APHIS and USDA home pages.

Plans are under way to further develop the site to include other industry sectors involved in avian influenza surveillance, such as poultry breeding populations, table-egg layers, meat-type turkeys, and the Live Bird Marketing System. This will provide a more comprehensive view of all avian influenza surveillance in U.S. commercial poultry sectors.

The current monthly surveillance reports for commercial poultry complement the wild bird surveillance sampling reports and updates provided on the U.S. Geological Survey's National Biological Information Infrastructure Wildlife Disease Information Web site, (http://wildlifedisease.nbii.gov/ai/). These Web sites are cross-linked so that users can view sampling and surveillance data collection efforts in domestic or wild populations.