

# NEWS RELEASE

## Texas Animal Health Commission

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### **Avian Influenza (AI) Detected in Small Flock in Hopkins County**

Laboratory tests Tuesday, June 22, confirmed that a flock of 14 birds in Hopkins County in northeast Texas was infected with H7N3, the same strain of the avian influenza (AI) that led to the depopulation and burial of 48,000 commercial breeding chickens in the county in mid-May. The small flock, located about 4 ½ miles from the depopulated commercial operations, was immediately euthanized and incinerated. Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) veterinarians now may need to revise the AI disease surveillance plan, and additional testing of flocks in the area will be necessary to ensure disease eradication and satisfy the requirements of interstate and international trading partners.

“This turn of events is disappointing to us and the area’s poultry owners, but it demonstrates why widespread, repeated flock testing is necessary during an AI outbreak. This infected noncommercial flock was one of more than 315 in a 300-square mile area that tested negative a little more than two weeks ago. Our on-site team had nearly completed the second round of testing the flocks when the National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa, reported the positive test results on the small 14-bird flock that had 10 chickens and four ducks,” said Dr. Max Coats, deputy director for Animal Health Programs for the TAHC, the state’s livestock and poultry health regulatory agency.

Dr. Coats said a team comprised of TAHC and US Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspectors and two veterinarians has been stationed in Sulphur Springs since mid-May, after two commercial breeding flocks nearby tested positive for the H7N3 strain of AI on routine blood tests. The chickens, which did not exhibit signs of disease, were depopulated and buried, to prevent potential disease exposure to other birds. The AI virus was not isolated in subsequent laboratory tests. A third commercial flock in the testing area, also with breeding chickens, has tested negative for the disease.

The joint state and federal team has worked seven days a week, first to canvass the area and issue ‘hold orders,’ so birds would not be moved from the immediate area until all testing was completed. The team then collected swabs and blood samples from birds for laboratory sampling, explained Dr. Coats. Tests are run at the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratories in College Station, Gonzales or Center, and samples with inconclusive or positive results are forwarded to the NVSL for confirmation testing.

“We will need to retest some of the area’s flocks again, in order to assure our trading partners that all traces of this viral bird disease have been detected and eradicated,” said Dr. Coats. “Additionally, we will have to change our testing area, as the testing protocol calls for disease surveillance within a 10-mile radius of an infected flock — whether it is a commercial or noncommercial operation.”

“I want to express my appreciation to the area’s poultry owners for their outstanding cooperation during this trying time,” he said. “If our team continues to work seven days a week, and the weather continues to be favorable, we may be able to complete the disease surveillance by the end of July, provided we do not encounter additional infection.”