September 9, 2015

To: Minnesota Turkey Growers
    Minnesota Turkey Processing Plants
    Minnesota Turkey Growers Association Board of Directors

From: Dr. Dale Lauer
       Poultry Program Director
       Minnesota Board of Animal Health

RE: HPAI and Fall Migratory Risks

The Minnesota poultry industry has experienced an unprecedented event in 2015 with the arrival of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) H5N2 virus into our Minnesota live poultry production systems. This is a game changer for Minnesota poultry producers! Extraordinary measures are now being taken to prevent re-introduction of the virus during the fall waterfowl migratory season and it is important that all producers work together to make this happen. The cornerstone of these biosecurity measures include prevention of the interface between domestic poultry and wild birds.

The Board has worked with the turkey industry for decades to conduct surveillance for influenza viruses, collaborate with the University of Minnesota on research projects and cooperate with the turkey industry on responsible response activities. These efforts have helped to minimize the number of influenza introductions, respond cooperatively and lessen the impact of these viruses on the producer, processor and entire Minnesota poultry industry. These efforts to safeguard not only the turkey industry, but also the layer and broiler industries in Minnesota are now more than ever, an important undertaking.

With changes in consumer wishes, there is a move toward ranging turkeys, a practice that was associated with avian influenza risk in the past. Given what is known about the highly pathogenic virus in Minnesota this is a practice that puts the entire industry at risk, a risk greater than the producer experiences alone given our current HPAI situation. Realizing that the Board can only make recommendations on these production practices, my suggestions are to:

- Discourage any type of range or outside access of commercial turkey production especially during the highest risk times of the year, fall and spring migratory waterfowl movement. Flock placement numbers should be so they can avoid direct outdoor access.
- If “range turkey production” is needed/required to meet production needs, mitigation strategies such as dedicated trucks/loaders/personnel must be employed to prevent movement of infected, undetected flocks that potentially contaminate other poultry sites. This is one of our biggest risks.
- Additional strategies such as ranging turkeys in areas outside high density turkey production sites and processing at the end of the week with additional down time as used with other influenza viruses may be helpful.
- If clinical signs suggestive of HPAI are identified, the producer’s veterinarian or Board should be notified immediately.

I understand that these turkey production practices are business decisions that the Board cannot make for the industry. However some of these practices in densely populated poultry production areas result in consequences that are too devastating for the industry to handle at this time. For me these “range turkey production” activities are a risky endeavor given the current state of HPAI that has too many unknowns. In addition if any commercial poultry premises becomes identified with HPAI this fall, another round of HPAI response activities will again begin impacting our poultry operations, business continuity and extend trade embargos already in place.

If there are questions or additional concerns let me know.

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