

Newcastle Diagnosed In California Flock

Exotic Newcastle disease of poultry and other birds has been diagnosed in Egg City, a 2.8-million-bird egg-laying operation near Moorpark in Ventura county, Calif., the U.S. Depart-

ment of Agriculture (USDA) reported last week.

The flock will be destroyed and the owner paid a Federal indemnity for their fair market value. USDA and the California

Department of Agriculture have been fighting exotic Newcastle disease in Southern California since mid-March, when a national emergency was declared because of a spreading outbreak of the disease that was brought into Southern California by a shipment of exotic birds.

USDA officials emphasized that exotic Newcastle is not a hazard to consumers of eggs and poultry products—that these products are perfectly safe to eat.

There are about 34.6 million laying hens in Southern California. Nationwide, there are an estimated 303.7 million layers.

Officials of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) explained that if the disease became established in this country, broilers and replacement pullets for laying flocks would be particularly vulnerable. Turkey production for the coming holiday seasons would also be severely threatened.

Early diagnosis of the disease at Egg City was made possible through the placement of "sentinel birds." The State-Federal Task Force fighting the disease in Southern California has been using these highly susceptible chickens—which have been raised free of specific diseases—as a means of detecting inapparent infections. The sentinel birds, strategically positioned among the Egg City flock, became sick and laboratory tests confirmed exotic Newcastle infection.

APHIS officials explained that destruction of infected and exposed flocks is the only sure way of eradicating the disease. Proper vaccination of unexposed flocks can provide some protection against infection with exotic Newcastle, but once the virus gains a foothold, there is no other effective way of eliminating it.

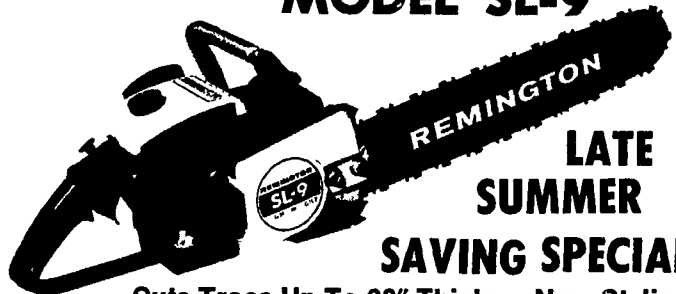
Since the declaration of the Southern California emergency in March, some 4.2 million birds have been destroyed at a cost of about \$7.6 million in Federal indemnities, according to APHIS officials. In late July, the eight-county quarantine was reduced to about one-third of its original size. USDA noted that the Moorpark area is inside this reduced quarantine area.

Officials at that time emphasized that a key to eradicating the disease from the remaining area was tighter enforcement of quarantines along with greater surveillance, including such refined techniques as the placement of sentinel birds to locate remaining infected flocks.

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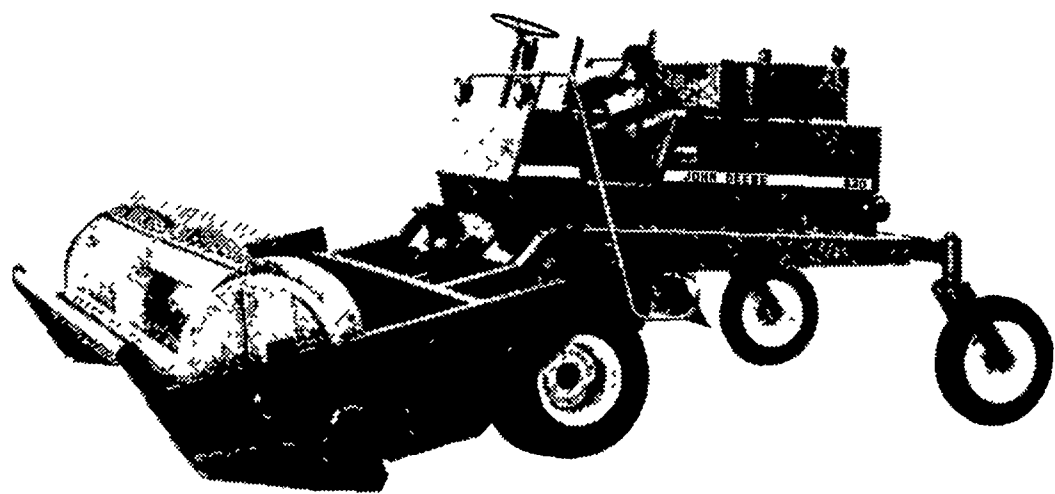
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