

Family hatcheries

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laments Emma. "Now we have to cross-examine every caller about where he lives. It's been a nightmare."

With earlier indications that the quarantine in the Gettysburg task force area might be lifted on March 1, the Case family had optimistically filled the incubators. Through the past months, customers had steadily been placing orders, many of them prepaid, and for which refunds will now have to be made.

Now, a month after that anticipated date of quarantine lifting, Avian flu task force officials promise virtually no hope for a removal of the ban on sales out of the quarantine area in the immediate future.

"At the earliest, it would be the middle of May," says Dr. Allan Furr, with the USDA's Vet Services Animal Health Program, at Hyattsville, Md. "And everything would have to 'click'; mid-May is optimistic."

"There's just too much at stake," the USDA official adds. "We're talking about a \$9.5 billion industry, a half-billion of that in export business."

Calling the Case situation, a "victim of circumstances," Dr. Furr affirmed the federal government's position that only flocks found to be infected with the Avian flu virus, and destroyed by the task forces, are eligible for indemnity payments.

Earlier, the Case's had asked officials to condemn and destroy their breeding flocks, an action prohibited by law since the birds are not diseased.

Business for the year, perhaps up to \$100,000 worth, is virtually lost.

Since the bulk of Case Hatchery's sales is out-of-state, shipments to these customers simply can't be made. Chicks are coming out of the incubators, and eggs that normally would go for hatching are instead bringing a salvage price for table use wholesaling.

Egg laying by the breeding flocks is at a seasonal high. Normally, fertile a dozen eggs that might sell to customers intending to incubate them will bring up to

several dollars, depending on rarity of the breed. Wholesale value of a dozen chicken eggs is about 75 cents.

Parent stock for these breeds alone cost \$3.50 and up for just a day-old chick.

Day-old ducklings are valued at about 73 cents, but a whole dozen of eggs sold through the wholesale market, bring less.

As the flock egg output continues, the incubators grow cold. Only the bare minimum of fertile eggs to fill customer orders for shipment within the quarantine area are being started in the incubator.

Normally, a weekly hatch during April and May numbers up to 40,000 chicks, 4,000 to 6,000 turkeys and, in the weeks just prior to



Newly-hatched chicks being carefully moved into boxes by Emma Case faced death two days later, because of Avian flu quarantine banning sales out of the quarantine area.



Allan Case, Jr., loads out the dozen orders for chicks that left the family's hatchery on Monday. Normal volume of orders for this time of year fills three trucks.

easter, up to 3,000 ducklings.

A special shipment of 750 turkey hatchlings came in Monday, and 2500 are due in from a Texas breeder on April 16.

"We had hopes until March 1 came and went, but I'm really depressed now," Emma admits. "We're about at the point of eradicating ourselves as a hatchery. While you always know that something like this can happen, you never believe that it will."

While some task force officials have suggested that the Cases keep track of the birds they've destroyed, Emma sees little hope at this point of recovering any losses.

Additionally, they're feeding an extra 5,000 birds that normally would have been culled weekly at local markets and auctions. All live auctions were closed when the quarantine went into effect.

A meeting was scheduled for Tuesday afternoon in Hyattsville, for USDA's officials there to look at the most recent Avian flu information. While no new cases

have broken out in the Gettysburg area since December 28, officials continue to monitor about 30 flocks that had been possibly exposed to the highly pathogenic strain found in a flock near East Berlin.

One case was confirmed in the Lancaster area over last weekend, according to Dr. Furr.

Local customers and neighbors continue to filter into the Case family's hatchery sales area, and orders trickle in from the quarantine zone.

Faced with hundreds of bright-eyed chicks, ducklings and goslings, buyers are taking perhaps a few more than they had originally intended, knowing that death is the fate for most of the tiny birds.

Such kindness, support and understanding by loyal customers have helped to shore up the Case family's fading morale.

"We owe it to our local customers to finish out the year," adds Emma. "After that..."

Her sentence, unfinished, trails to oblivion.

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