

Avian flu

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development. According to Dr. Kradel, the program is made up of four major components: serological testing, incident reporting, improved utilization of diagnostic labs and communication of poultry health information.

In the testing phase, processing plants are requested to submit 10 cull eggs from each flock on a monthly basis. Hatcheries will also participate in the program. These eggs will be tested for AI antibodies, says Dr. Kradel, adding that about 1400 flocks will be monitored when the program is in full swing.

A blood-testing program will offer similar insurance to the broiler, turkey and gamebird industries. Ten samples from each flock (an individual poultry house is considered a flock) will be collected at slaughter. "We estimate we'll be testing 40 to 60 flocks a week by this means," notes Dr. Kradel, adding that testing will be done at the diagnostic labs located at New Bolton Center, Delaware Valley,

Penn State and PDA's Summerdale facility.

Other phases of the testing program include sampling at poultry auctions on a weekly basis. PDA has three avian health inspectors, two of which attend the auctions to collect blood samples in an effort to monitor the small backyard operations. The testing phase will also include samples submitted from show stock, as well as flocks participating in other disease control programs for pullorum, MG (mycoplasmae gallisepticum) and MS (mycoplasmae synoviae).

"In the incident reporting component of the program, we're attempting to get the cooperation of all people who diagnose problems relating to avian health," says Dr. Kradel, adding that the category would include poultry servicemen, veterinarians, Extension specialists and county agents. Those participating are asked to fill out data sheets on suspect flocks and submit them to Penn State, where the information will be collated. Servicemen will

also be provided with kits for sampling blood and collecting material for virus isolation and microscopic examination.

Improved and increased use of diagnostic laboratory facilities is the program's third component.

Finally, the program will provide better communication of poultry health information. In the immediate future is a bi-weekly newsletter that will go out to servicemen, Extension personnel, processors and others involved in poultry health. The letter will keep participants apprised of health problems, as well as the overall progress of the monitoring program.

A more ambitious undertaking will be the development of a statewide poultry health computer network that will integrate the diagnostic lab computer network with the Extension computer network developed by Penn State. In addition to giving the industry immediate access to the latest AI information, disease alerts on a host of other poultry maladies, such as laryngotracheitis (LT) and

Newcastle disease will also be provided. Dr. Kradel emphasizes that data on individual flocks will be considered confidential, and will be provided to only those authorized to receive it, such as flock owners, servicemen and feed companies.

Dr. Kradel stresses that the program is totally voluntary and no penalties are involved for those electing not to participate. "But I have some real reservations that a few people that might not cooperate would jeopardize the entire industry," he says.

Thus far, industry acceptance of the program has been heartening, reports the program's field coordinator Shirley Pflieger, of Manheim. Since coming on board as the program's first coordinator in early April, Pflieger has covered 25 of the 47 counties with hatcheries, processing businesses and slaughter plants.

"I still have about 65 processors and hatcheries to contact," she says, noting that 74 processors and hatcheries, as well as a dozen slaughter plants have agreed to participate. "Whenever you have a new program, there's always a handful that give you problems," notes Pflieger, "but the cooperation among the larger processors and slaughter plants has been really good."

One component conspicuously absent from the program is fun-

ding for indemnity, and Dr. Kradel emphasizes that providing some way to compensate farmers is crucial to any monitoring program. "Industry and government have got to develop a program so people aren't afraid of the consequences of coming out in the open with their problems."

And Pennsylvania Poultry Federation spokesman Tim Allwein concurs. "We're acutely aware of the problem, and we're hoping to get it solved as soon as possible," Allwein states, adding that several options, including a pledge system, insurance and a check-off program have been explored. Thus far, however, the industry has come up with nothing favored by a majority.

Allwein did note that Federation members are united in their opposition to a feed tax such as the \$1/ton tax on all livestock feed proposed last year. Such a system would have been burdensome to the poultry industry, Allwein said, since the tax would be levied only on commercially mixed feed. The poultry industry relies more heavily on commercial feeds than any other livestock segment, he pointed out.

Meanwhile, as the poultry industry struggles over the question of indemnity funding, proponents of the new monitoring program hope to have it running on all cylinders by the middle of July

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