

# Guidelines Set For Reopening Markets

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Effective April 1, state departments of agriculture in Delaware, Maryland, and Pennsylvania jointly rescinded prohibitions against the sale of live poultry at auction markets in those states.

This action cancelled an order issued on January 26 that halted sales at live poultry auctions because of a serious threat posed to the poultry industry by outbreaks of avian influenza type H5N2. Both actions were taken in accordance with the Mid-Atlantic Poultry Health Agreement of 1987.

Guidelines for lifting the ban were developed at a March 10 meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Cooperative Extension (MACE) Poultry Health and Management Unit at the College Park campus of the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine. Poultry researchers, regulatory officials, and extension educators from Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture were in attendance.

The MACE guidelines called for live poultry auction markets to agree to these terms:

- Sentinel birds to be included with the caged poultry. Caging four sentinel birds in scattered locations at each market was suggested.

- The sentinel birds would be caged on the day prior to each auction and removed on the day following each auction. They would be shipped to a designated state animal health laboratory to be tested for avian influenza and other poultry diseases.

- Birds not testing serologically positive could be returned to the live auction markets and reused as sentinel birds within two weeks. Live auction market workers will do thorough sweeping and disinfecting of the premises between sales. They also will give proper care to the sentinel birds. USDA animal health regulatory officials will continue to make periodic environmental tests at the markets.

- Live auction market operators are requested to give renewed emphasis to recordkeeping so that buyers and sellers of live poultry can be identified. This procedure is necessary in order to locate flocks where disease outbreaks may have occurred.

- The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has been requested to develop equitable guidelines for dealing with flocks where disease outbreaks are confirmed.

Dr. H. Wesley Towers, a member of the guidelines committee, notes that the MACE suggestions will be followed completely in Delaware and Maryland. Towers is the state veterinarian in Delaware.

But Pennsylvania officials have decided not to adopt the sentinel bird procedure. No formal action toward accepting the guidelines has been taken in Virginia, partly because no prohibition against live auction sales had been instituted.

Poultry health professional workers involved in the MACE organization note that live poultry auction markets have received special attention because they were found to be involved in spreading avian influenza during the recent 1992-1993 outbreak and in various outbreaks during the 1980s.

The latest outbreaks so far have been confined to small flocks and have not as yet spread to large

commercial broiler or layer flocks in the Mid-Atlantic area.

Along with an ever-growing commercial poultry industry, small flock numbers, too, are booming in the Mid-Atlantic and Delmarva areas, according to Dr. Charles J. Wabek, a poultry specialist for the Cooperative Extension Service, Maryland Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources, a part of the University of Maryland System.

Wabek is stationed at the Princess Anne facility of the Lower Eastern Shore Research and Education Center. He notes that more than 1,800 backyard flocks have been counted on the Delmarva peninsula in a project headed by Dr. Jeannine M. Harter-Dennis at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in Princess Anne.

Many of these small flocks are of a specialized nature, containing rare or valuable types of birds not found in large commercial flocks. For that reason, wholesale depopulation of infected flocks—as has been practiced with commercial flocks—may not be equitable. In some cases, the birds may be irreplaceable.

But small flock owners—and

the live auction markets that they often patronize—need to wake up to the necessity of practicing biosecurity in order to prevent serious disease outbreaks that could devastate both the small flock/live auction network and the entire commercial poultry industry.

In the Delmarva area alone, broiler production and processing brings in an annual income of \$1.25 billion and employs 22,000 persons, according to J. William Satterfield, executive director of Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc., a trade organization headquartered at Georgetown, Del.

## Leaders Discuss Ag Priorities

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — Representatives of 34 agricultural organizations met here recently to outline priorities and concerns for Pennsylvania agriculture through the year 2000.

Secretary of Agriculture Boyd E. Wolff told delegates to the day-long Pennsylvania Ag-Agenda program that the event was organized to give all agriculture-related organizations an opportunity to exchange ideas on both short and long term priorities.

"The delegates who attended made the decisions concerning topics for discussion, because prior to the meeting we asked each organization to outline its concerns," Wolff said.

"The discussion demonstrated there are great concerns over the environment, farmland preservation, governmental regulation, the profitability of farming, animal health, nutrient management, food safety, and a variety of funding issues."

After outlining priorities and goals, delegates to the Ag-Agenda conference discussed cooperative efforts so that organizations with common goals and concerns can work together toward solving problems.

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