

Heat, Humidity Stressful

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of Lancaster Farming reported on some of the storm damage to agricultural producers in Franklin and Adams counties.

However, stories of heavy losses of poultry in Pennsylvania have been mostly unconfirmed or remained unconfirmable by presstime.

What has been confirmed is that there were some large heat related losses of birds, especially in the Midwest, according to Connie Bish, a U.S. Department of Agriculture AMS Poultry Market News poultry market reporter working out of Atlanta, Georgia.

Bish said an unofficial tally of losses, mostly compiled from conversations with field people, is that about 3.8 million layers died.

"That's a pretty large loss. Some people lost as much as 8 percent of their flock and they'd like to see less than a half percent (loss)," Bish said.

She said the heat that hit the Midwest and traveled to the East did cause some "very large abnormal mortality," but the heat also depressed the quality of the eggs produced, so the effect was compounded.

She said the combination of mortality and depressed production brought about spot shortages of eggs and an increase in price.

The wholesale price of eggs temporarily jumped to over a dollar per dozen jumbos following losses of layers in facilities in the Midwest.

Bish said Thursday afternoon that in her eight years as a reporter for the USDA, she has never seen such a dramatic price swing.

In one week — from July 14 to

July 20 — the price of a dozen jumbos went from 85 cents per dozen on Monday to \$1 per dozen by Thursday, according to weekly New York egg market Northeast quotes (reported weekly in Lancaster Farming).

From June 20 to July 6, the price was steady at 80 cents per dozen jumbos.

During the week from July 21 to July 27, jumbos started at \$1.02 per dozen and ended at \$1.06.

This week, egg prices have dropped again.

Using the same market quotes, the price of a dozen of jumbos stayed at \$1.06 from Monday through Wednesday, but dropped to 98 cents per dozen on Thursday. (See page 4 for more egg price information).

Egg prices are controlled by a supply and demand system that is largely controlled through contracts with a small percentage of the industry conducting regular price negotiations.

While the hot season has just begun and no one can forecast what the price of eggs or any other quickly perishable agricultural commodity might do in the near future, Bish said the industry is recovering fairly quickly.

Bish said that Pennsylvania egg producers apparently did not suffer the losses as did egg producers in states including Iowa, Indiana, Nebraska and Illinois.

According to Bish, Pennsylvania producers actually enjoyed the benefit of a tighter national market to increase the price for eggs. She said that it can take up to six to eight months for a full recovery, and in the meantime, because the price was low prior to the heat

mortality in the Midwest, she said she expects the price to stay above those pre-heat wave lows.

In the dairy industry, milk demand is normally down during the summer, and milk production is normally down.

Again, while there have been no documented cases of milk shortages, some area dairymen have said that they suffered losses of up to 20 pounds milk per day per animal on the heel of the mid-July heat wave.

Most dairy farmers report that the herds have almost recovered, despite continuing, but lower heat.

In recent years, many dairymen have instituted several techniques for cooling cows, mainly using the cooling properties of evaporation, protection from the sun, and tunnel or other forms of strong ventilation.

Ironically, Bish said that while the Midwest egg producers suffered significant losses (up to 8 percent of a flock with an estimated average of almost a 2 percent loss overall), those in the South have had little trouble dealing with the heat, leading some to conjecture that those in the Midwest are using structures which are designed more for keeping birds from freezing than overheating, while Southern facilities and techniques have evolved around combating high heat and humidity.

Dairy experts have been advising Northeast and Pennsylvania dairy farmers to abandon the historic dairy husbandry practice of building against the cold. For about 10 years the industry has been changing to buildings designed for ventilation and cooling properties.

Local extension agent John Schwartz said he knew that poultry mortality was up, but was not sure

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how much. The worst stretch that he was aware of was from July 14 through July 16.

Even though daytime temperatures had risen in days before, evening and nighttime cooling prevented over-stressing of birds.

However, that particular weekend saw no respite from the heat. The temperature didn't drop below 90 degrees until 2 a.m. Sunday.

According to Schwartz, poultry (originally a warm climate bird) can tolerate periods of high heat, as long as a break comes. For an 18-hours period the temperature was more than 100 degrees, he said.

However, since the nature of the poultry industry is primarily contract production, and occasional and minor heat losses are not unknown, there has been no official reporting or documentation of significant losses, and that is probably because the losses aren't significant.

At the University of Pennsylvania Poultry lab at New Bolton, Dr. Bob Eckroade said he hasn't heard any confirmed reports of large losses in the state or in the Delmarva region, though he has heard conversational stories that there have been some large losses somewhere.

Others poultry officials in the Delmarva area also could not confirm any large losses due to heat and humidity.

In other production news, tobacco growers concerned about a disease called "blue mold" are too late to do anything about it.

In the June 17 issue of Lancaster Farming, John O. Yocum, a senior research assistant at the Penn State Research Station in Landisville reported the discovery

of blue mold in a tobacco bed.

According to that report, the plants found to have been infected with the fungus were not treated with a commercial fungicide that uses the active ingredient metalaxyl. The fungicide is called Ridomil, and in his article, Yocum advised that if a plant bed had blue mold, "it should be destroyed since the spores are spread by air and will infect any untreated tobacco.

On Thursday, Yocum said that there really isn't anything that a tobacco grower can do now.

All blue mold discovered is believed to be caused by a failure to use adequate protective measures during seed bed preparation, at seeding and again at last cultivation.

Yocum said that there are a few cases in which growers did use the fungicide but still contracted blue mold in some plants.

In a comparison of tobacco grown at the research station which did not suffer any fungus infection, the cases of blue mold appearing in treated plants are similar in that they were planted early.

Yocum said it could be very likely that excessive rain diluted the fungicide or flushed it away from the plant in the earlier plantings.

The other possibility is that it could be a form of blue mold which is resistant to Ridomil, the fungicide approved for use.

Yocum said samples were being sent for laboratory identification, but that results wouldn't be known for 30 days.

If the blue mold would be the resistant strain, then producers could use another fungicide

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