

# Statewide AI Biosecurity Regulations Not Needed

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UNION DEPOSIT (Dauphin Co.) — The announcement this week by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture of the resurfacing of avian influenza in Lancaster County may well stimulate some unfamiliar with state strategy to call for increased regulations. However, according to reports given during the Pennsylvania Avian Health Symposium, held Jan. 29 at the Harrisburg Sheraton East, the state doesn't need statewide, specific regulations for biosecurity measures to combat diseases such as avian influenza.

The main reason — the relatively new state Domestic Animal Law gives the state Department of Agriculture additional authorities so that it can, among other things, create case-by-case (farm-by-farm) rules of quarantine specific to an operation and disease.

Were a set of regulations covering biosecurity or quarantine to be adopted, it is more likely that rapid advancements in knowledge of diseases, types of testing, and changes in diseases, all would

make the regulations outdated and nonsensical, according to Dr. Bruce Schmucker, an animal health control expert with the PDA.

The Pa. Avian Health Symposium was held for several reasons, not the least to fulfill a request from the state Legislature for information and recommendations in dealing with avian influenza, as well as other infectious poultry diseases.

The state Legislature had approved, and state Gov. Tom Ridge this past year authorized, the spending of up to \$5 million to help poultry producers recoup some losses resulting from the voluntary and mandatory destruction of poultry flocks found to test positive for the H7N2 avian influenza; to pay for the costs of bird destruction, facilities disinfection and cleaning; and to pay for research.

In order to comply with the request from the Legislature for information, the state Department of Agriculture, under the oversight of state Deputy Secretary of Agriculture for Administration Zoann Parker, formed five committees,

comprised of "stakeholders" and public officials.

Of the five committees, one formed to research legal issues; another focused on the live bird market; another on insurance; one on research; and one on risk reduction.

The general consensus of the symposium was that such a meeting representing the broad scope of avian industry in Pennsylvania was long overdue, and that all components of the industry need to be involved in battling contagious disease.

The role of hobbyists, purebred breeders, and those raising birds specifically to serve the live bird markets in preventing the spread of avian influenza or other disease was highlighted.

Rev. Roland Romig, representing the entire spectrum of "backyarders," told the group about the importance, permanence and growth opportunities in the live bird markets.

Live bird markets are cited as a constant source of the avian influenza, though not a cause.

That disease has turned up com-

monly in the New York/New Jersey live bird markets, and in some other live bird markets, which has given the markets a negative reputation.

However, according to Romig and others at the symposium, the real problem seems to be a lack of usable testing and health certification, as well as discovering a method for weeding out the few unethical or shoddy operations supplying the markets.

In essence, Romig requested that the rest of the industry recognize the importance of the live bird market to its suppliers as well as the state's rural economy, and to consider the fact that "backyarder" flocks serve as a vast reserve of poultry genetics, as compared to the birds raised and bred by commercial and contract growers.

Of major concern to Romig were the Jan. 2-effective New York regulations imposing new and extensive health certification requirements for shipping live birds to its markets.

However, Pennsylvania's own regulations — or lack of them — were praised for the cooperation

fostered between industry and state.

According to Dwight-Jared Smith, an attorney working for the state, the state isn't seeking any more regulation of the industry than it has to have, and only a lack of cooperation and trust would create a demand for more intense regulation.

Smith and Schmucker were two of several speakers during the all-day symposium to discuss issues of concern to the entire bird-raising community, Smith explained the new and expanded enforcement authority granted the PDA under the 1996 Domestic Animal Law.

Attorney Smith said that during the previous (to this week) outbreak of avian influenza, he had some role in drafting specific quarantine rules, although the need for legal work in otherwise dealing with the situation was nil, indicating that government/industry cooperation and stakeholder-involved problem solving can result in mutually agreeable results.

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## Avian Influenza

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The second farm is located well south of the northern part of the county where a large area had been under general quarantine for six months.

As was done with a previous incident, the birds are not to be immediately destroyed, but are to be studied while under quarantine.

All of the other flocks testing positive for the non-lethal (causes some death and sickness, but doesn't wipe out a flock as the lethal variety), were destroyed immediately, except for the last one prior to the discovery announced this week.

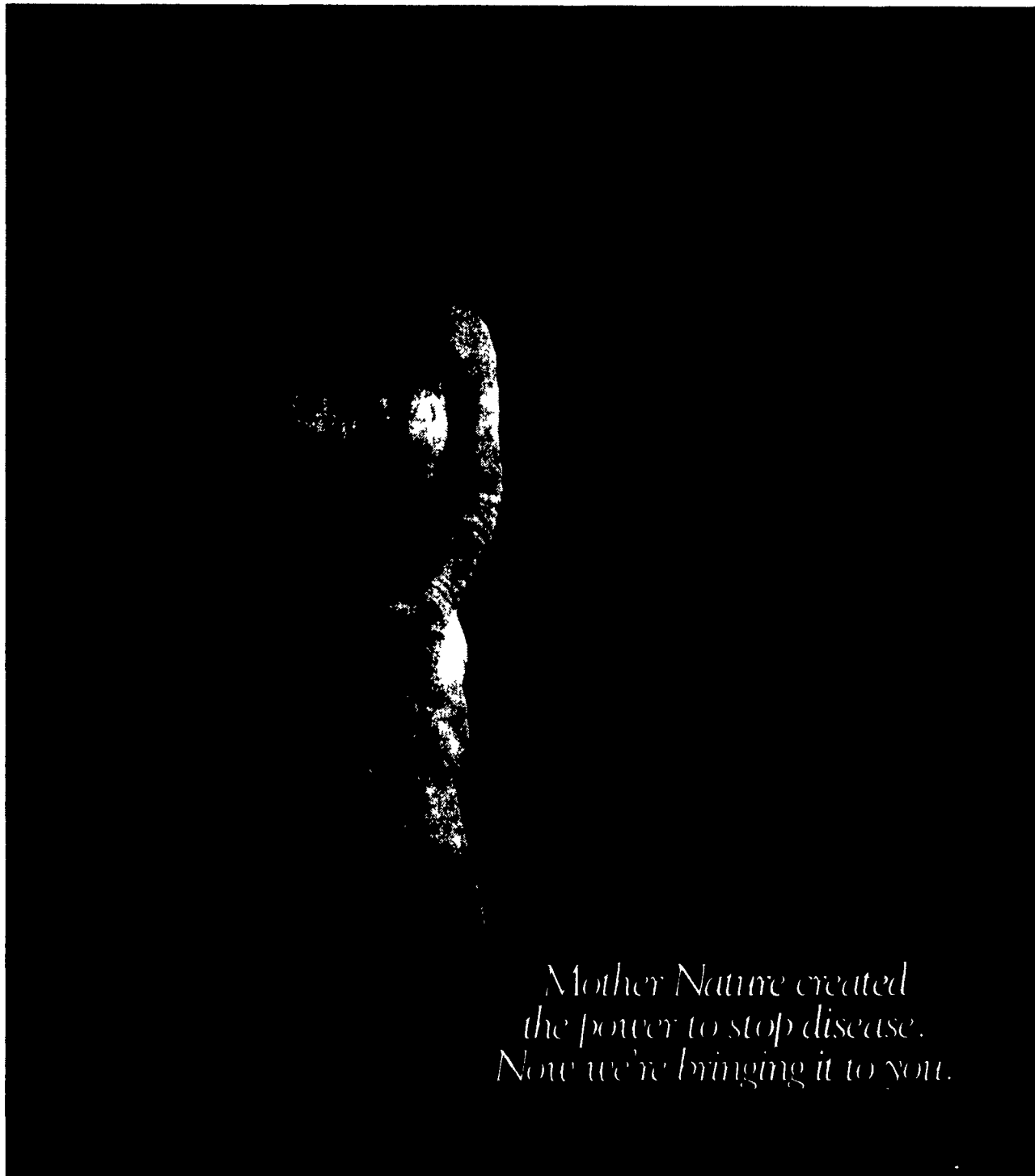
Earlier this year, it was explained by state officials that delaying the destruction of the birds was done because it was suspected that soon after discovering the disease, the virus may be in a more infectious stage.

It was considered that if the disease is more infectious soon after discovered, then bringing in additional people and vehicles into a farm for depopulation and disinfection may increase the risk of spreading the disease.

According to the PDA, in this most recent spate of outbreaks, there have been 20 flocks to date that have been found to have been infected with the H7N2 avian influenza, affecting two million birds.

Secretary Hayes said that the most recent discoveries were due to intensive testing and cooperative efforts between PDA and the poultry industry.

Hayes also said that some of the \$5 million authorized last year by the Legislature and Gov. Tom Ridge as nonreoccurring support for the industry to transition through the avian influenza emergency is still available.



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