

New Technology For Detecting Turkey Respiratory Virus Now Available

ATHENS, Ga. — Agricultural Research Service scientists have identified an important gene sequence that can help identify and differentiate avian metapneumovirus. This organism is responsible for turkey rhinotracheitis, an upper respiratory illness that causes sneezing, swollen sinuses, nasal discharge and coughing in turkeys.

Microbiologists Bruce Seal and Rene Alvarez of the Southeast Poultry Research Laboratory in Athens, Ga., deciphered a segment of the virus' genetic sequence. The sequence, previously unrecorded in the genetic databases, could be used to develop a diagnostic detection kit.

Avian metapneumovirus can

be found in turkey and chicken flocks throughout the world, but is frequently reported in turkeys in Minnesota and Europe.

The virus is also associated with swollen head syndrome and infectious respiratory disease in chickens outside of the United States.

Although not very virulent by itself, avian metapneumovirus — in combination with other pathogens or Newcastle disease vaccines — can cause severe respiratory disease and weight loss in poultry. Early detection of the metapneumovirus may allow better timing of Newcastle disease virus vaccination to prevent this complication.

The metapneumovirus is pri-

marily transmitted by surface contact, which allows producers to reduce its effects by using biocontainment methods such as disinfection and controlled access to poultry houses.

Avian metapneumovirus causes a high rate of illness in turkeys that are 6-12 weeks of age. Early detection would allow producers to take action and reduce potential losses in this segment of the flock.

A patent application was filed in November 2002 for the unique gene sequence, and the technology is now available for licensing. The sequence may also be useful for developing methods to detect different avian metapneumovirus subtypes.

USDA Announces Program To Protect Grassland

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — The USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service announce the availability of \$660,000 in funding to protect grasslands within Pennsylvania through the new Grassland Reserve Program, legislated as part of the 2003 Farm Bill.

Grassland can be protected through 30-year or permanent easements which are similar to the Farmland Preservation Program, or through rental agreements that are set up much like the Conservation Program. Easements are based on an appraisal while rental payments vary by county and range from \$7 per acre to \$16.50 an acre. Rental contracts can be 10, 15, 20, or 30 years in length. Haying

will likely be restricted during nesting periods to protect critical wildlife habitat.

There is a minimum requirement of 40 contiguous acres and applications will be prioritized based on ranking criteria that will be placed on the NRCS Website at www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov. While applications will be accepted at any time, there is an Aug. 1, cut-off for ranking applications for FY03 funding. This will allow time for contract obligations to be completed prior to the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30.

For information contact a USDA Service Center which can be found in the telephone book under USDA, Natural Conservation Service or Farm Service Agency.

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Farm Bureau And Farmers Union Urge Congress To Restore Funding For COOL

WASHINGTON, D.C. — National Farmers Union (NFU) and the American Farm Federation (AFBF) co-signed a letter

of support for mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) for food this week in light of recent attempts in the House of Representatives to weaken the new law.

The two general farm organizations sent a joint letter to House members July 10 opposing language in the fis-

cal year 2004 agriculture appropriations bill that would freeze funding for the implementation of origin labeling for meats. The House is expected to consider the legislation as early as July 14.

"The secretary of agriculture has the ultimate responsibility to ensure mandatory country-of-origin labeling is successful," said NFU President Dave Frederickson. "Instead of back-tracking to weaken this important legislation before the rules are even written, Congress should work closely

with USDA to make sure the final guidelines match the original congressional intent and are friendly to producers and consumers as well as processors."

NFU and AFBF, which together represent the majority of the nation's agriculture producers, support an amendment to restore funding for country-of-origin labeling, which Reps. Dennis Rehberg, R-Mont., and Darlene Hooley, D-Ore., introduced this week.

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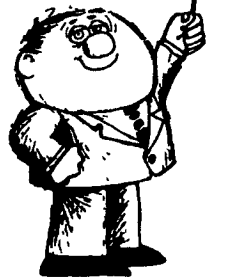
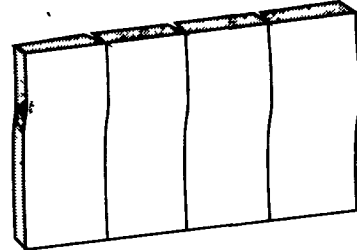
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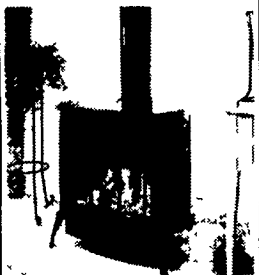
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