

**Statement of Dr. Hartmann**  
**Executive Director and State Veterinarian**  
**Minnesota Board of Animal Health**  
**Before the**  
**House Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture**  
**July 30, 2015**

**Background**

The Minnesota Board of Animal Health (Board) is the lead state agency for emergencies involving domestic and foreign animal diseases. When the first case of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was found in Minnesota, the Board took the lead in responding. The Board has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) to support the Board in the event of a foreign animal disease because such a situation requires resources beyond what the Board has available. So as we found more infected farms we enlisted the assistance of MDA using the incident command structure. Eventually the outbreak exceeded the capacity of Minnesota to respond and we requested an incident management team from USDA:APHIS:Veterinary Services. On April 23, 2015 Governor Dayton declared a peace time emergency. This emergency declaration allowed for the State Emergency Operations Center to be activated and provided access to all of the state government's assets. Other agencies that assisted in the response include the Minnesota Departments of Health, Natural Resources and Public Safety and the National Guard.

**Minnesota Poultry Industry**

Minnesota is ranked number one for turkey production. The state's 450 turkey farmers raise approximately 45 million birds annually on 600 farms, bringing more than \$600 million in income for farmers, processors and other related industries. Minnesota has more independent turkey farmers than any other state in the U.S. Many of these farmers are 3rd, 4th and even 5th generation family farmers. As the nation's largest producer and processor of turkey, Minnesota is home to three turkey processing companies with a total of seven processing plants around the state. The state is also home to the largest turkey hatchery company in the world. Every Minnesota turkey generates \$17.46 of direct economic activity to the state, providing \$807 million in economic impact. The turkey industry also is responsible for 6,000 direct jobs in on-farm and processing activities. The majority of turkeys raised in Minnesota are more likely to be shipped outside the state.

- Ninety (90) percent of turkey products processed in state are exported out of Minnesota.
- Of that 90 percent, approximately 15 percent are exported to international markets.

Minnesota's egg farmers currently rank number 8 for egg production in the U.S. Farmers care for approximately 11 million egg-laying hens and produce about 2.9 billion eggs annually. The production value of Minnesota's egg industry is approximately \$170 million, and accounts for over 2,900 jobs. Minnesota's broiler chicken farmers raise 47 million birds on an annual basis, with an economic value of \$123 million. Processing activities add \$19 million to the value of broilers produced in Minnesota, and the industry contributes 1,300+ direct jobs on farm and in processing.

### **The Outbreak**

It is an understatement to say that HPAI in Minnesota has been devastating and extremely difficult for all involved. The outbreak in Minnesota started on March 4, 2015. This first case was in a turkey breeding facility. Increased death loss led to samples being tested for HPAI at the Minnesota Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory. The test was positive and samples were sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratory for a confirmatory diagnosis. By the time a diagnosis was made all but a few of the 20,000 turkeys in the affected barn had died. The owner did not receive any compensation for the dead birds. There was a three-week break between that first case and the second case. After that there were one or more new cases almost every day. On the worst day, there were eight new cases. At the height of the outbreak we had 110 farms quarantined in 23 counties. This included a turkey complex with 310,000 birds and a chicken layer complex with over 2 million birds. Over nine million birds have died or were depopulated to prevent the spread of this virus. The hardest part of this disease has been to see the emotional toll it has taken on affected growers and the industry as a whole.

### **Minnesota's Response**

Minnesota has extensive experience in responding to animal disease outbreaks, especially with low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI). In the past turkeys were raised outside in Minnesota and exposed to wild waterfowl. This resulted in many cases of LPAI each year in turkeys. Representatives of the poultry industry, the University of Minnesota and the state worked together to develop a prevention, notification and response plan for LPAI. One of the changes made was that most turkeys are raised indoors now. This greatly reduced the number of LPAI cases. Working together with USDA Minnesota has followed the USDA guidelines for responding to HPAI. All 110 farms that were quarantined were appraised and depopulated with the USDA paying indemnity for the live birds. After depopulation the birds were composted in the barns. When the composted material is removed from the barns the barns have to be cleaned and disinfected and finally environmental tests are run before quarantine release.

Neighbors with poultry had to be tested and monitored for the disease (over 1,000 flocks were sampled). A permitting system had to be set up to allow poultry and poultry products to move

into, within and out of the control zones around the infected farms. We have issued permits for over 6,000 movements. It was so vital to have a science based, continuity of business permitting system in place prior to this event so that safe poultry and poultry products were able to move. Without this system in place the economic and animal welfare impacts of the outbreak would have been much worse.

### **Current Status**

We are working hard with our partners to get all of the affected farms back to business as usual. As of July 21, 2015 of the 110 farms that were quarantined and depopulated:

- Forty nine are no longer classified as positive,
- Thirty eight have restocked and
- Eight have been released from quarantine.

In addition, 98 of the control zones (6.2 mile radius around infected farms) have been eliminated. Even though we haven't found an infected flock in seven weeks we still have over 100 state, federal and contract people working on the completion of this response.

### **Lessons Learned**

This is the most extensive multistate animal health emergency we have ever faced. Our response was well coordinated and we worked well with the poultry industry, state and local officials, and USDA. The relationships the Board has built with key stakeholders over the years greatly assisted in a unified response. The most important lesson learned is that building relationships before a crisis is crucial.

It is also crucial that USDA and all states prepare and train. We need to have the resources necessary to depopulate infected flocks within 24 hours of diagnosis. When this is not done the virus quickly infects more birds which then sheds the virus in large quantities creating a heavily contaminated site, increasing the chance for lateral spread. The needed resources include equipment for depopulation and trained personnel. There should be facilities around the state where you can set up an emergency operations center near where the cases are found. Your laboratory must have enough trained technicians and equipment to manage the increased volume of tests. All poultry farms must have an emergency carcass disposal plan. A new level of bio-security is also necessary to stop the spread of this virus.

### **Preparations for the Fall**

Having lived through the spring outbreak we understand what is necessary to prepare for the possibility of a recurrence in the fall. We are procuring depopulation equipment adequate to be able to depopulate farms within 24 hours of diagnosis. We are exploring methods to rapidly depopulate large chicken layer complexes. Our personnel are well trained and ready to respond. We have identified a facility in the heart of Minnesota's turkey industry to use as a center of

operations that is available to lease for a year. Our Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory has hired and trained staff to meet the anticipated increase in volume of testing. Funding has been provided to increase the size and capacity of our Minnesota Poultry Testing Laboratory that is close to the poultry operations to supplement the testing of our diagnostic laboratory. We are working with poultry producers to audit their biosecurity and to make sure they have an emergency carcass disposal plan. Several meetings have been held to discuss strategy for the future bringing together industry, academia, local, state, and federal government.

Though we know that new challenges may be presented in the months to come, we are ready for and committed to a swift and unified response.