

February 1, 2022

Katie Poppiti
Pennsylvania Certified Organic
106 School Street, Suite 201
Spring Mills, PA 16875

Dear Ms. Poppiti,

In a letter sent to you in November of 2021, I requested that you consider granting participants in Organic poultry certification programs the option of confining poultry indoors temporarily as part of their increased biosecurity plans. In 2021 a number of outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in Europe and Asia were reported to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). Russia's veterinary authority has reported outbreaks of H5 in four regions of the country, and China has reported 21 human infections with the H5N6 subtype of avian influenza to date in 2021, which indicates that some virus types have zoonotic potential.

The most likely sources of infection are thought to be migrating wild birds.

Recently, USDA APHIS has confirmed additional findings of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in wild birds in the United States – one in Colleton County, South Carolina and one in Hyde County, North Carolina. These finds follow confirmation on January 14, 2022 of HPAI in a wild bird in Colleton County, South Carolina. Additionally, Virginia's state veterinarian informed poultry companies and industry allies Wednesday that five wild waterfowl harvested by hunters in central and eastern Virginia were tested by USDA and found to be positive for HPAI.

In Pennsylvania, we reported the finding of an H5 "detected" result in a wild American Black Duck sample collected by Wildlife Services on January 4, 2022 in Bucks County, PA.

USDA reports that these findings are not unexpected, as wild birds can be infected with HPAI and show no signs of illness. They can carry the disease to new areas when migrating. USDA anticipates additional wild bird findings as wild bird surveillance continues into the spring. Officials are recommending that in addition to practicing good biosecurity at all times, bird owners should prevent contact between their birds and wild birds and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to State/Federal officials.

Migratory birds, mostly wild waterfowl, may transmit the avian influenza when they come in contact during seasonal migration, and since the major migration flyways overlap, there is real concern that migratory waterfowl in Pennsylvania may be infected or could become infected in the coming weeks and potentially infect our commercial and backyard poultry flocks, many of which are allowed outdoor access. Pennsylvania has an extensive and diverse poultry industry, with more than 3,400 flocks enrolled in the National Poultry Improvement Plan, representing more than 191 million birds. Our commercial industry is becoming increasingly concerned about the risk wild birds pose to their organic poultry when they are outdoors.

As you know, the National Organic Program regulations (NOP) (§§205.239 (b) and (c)) allow for operators to provide temporary confinement indoors of organic livestock, including poultry, to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the animals. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture regards the current situation as being serious and we anticipate more cases of HPAI being identified in the wild bird

population in Pennsylvania. Therefore, we strongly recommend precautionary measures be taken now and remain in practice until May 1st, 2022 to minimize the threat to backyard and commercial poultry operations. Included in these measures are the enhancement of biosecurity practices and the recommendation to move all poultry indoors to prevent exposure to migratory birds and wild waterfowl until the immediate threat has passed. HPAI reports have been increasing rapidly recently and it is expected this elevated threat will persist through the winter months and spring migration; therefore, taking appropriate precautions immediately is paramount. USDA and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture surveillance for avian influenza is ongoing and information gathered will be shared with the poultry industry concerning the risk of transmission from migratory birds as the situation continues to evolve.

Thank you,



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