



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

May 8, 2015

Pennsylvania State Association of County Fairs
128 Cumberland Road
Bedford, PA 1552

RE: Suspension of Avian Competitions and Activities at Agricultural Fairs

Dear Sir or Madam:

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture is working proactively with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), other government agencies, and the state's poultry industry to prepare for an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza, identified as the H5N2 strain. This disease has already caused other states to lose millions of turkeys and chickens.

Wild bird species, such as ducks, swans and geese, can carry the virus, but usually do not exhibit symptoms. However, avian influenza is very contagious and can make domesticated birds, including chickens, ducks, quail, pheasants, guinea fowl and turkeys, very sick or even cause mortalities.

The department is making every effort to minimize the risk of avian influenza spreading should it appear in Pennsylvania. As such, and in recognition of the risk H5N2 poses to the state's poultry industry, the department is suspending all avian competitions for all state-approved agricultural fairs for 2015, including the 2016 Pennsylvania Farm Show, effective immediately.

The department is requesting that all additional open poultry shows, fairs and expositions in the state also refrain from avian activity in all forms, while the virus is spreading throughout the nation. Avian activity includes, but is not limited to poultry competitions, incubation displays, petting zoos, and other displays containing live poultry.

To be clear, there currently are no confirmed cases of H5N2 in Pennsylvania, but we should be cognizant of its potential impact. The last such outbreak, in 1983 and 1984, caused Pennsylvania to lose 17 million birds worth \$65 million.

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture is handling this situation with extreme caution, as the USDA has confirmed highly pathogenic avian influenza in the Pacific, Central and Mississippi flyways. The most important prevention is biosecurity for anyone who owns or works with poultry – whether on a commercial farm, in the wild, or at a hobby/ backyard farm. The best way to protect your birds is to follow good biosecurity. Please see the attached fact sheet explaining proper biosecurity practices.

We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause, as the 2015 agricultural fair season is underway. The purpose in this action is not to disturb regular agricultural fair practices, but to take proactive steps to reduce the risks of avian influenza spreading. The department will continue to monitor the situation as it develops, and we will remain in contact with the agricultural fairs management and Penn State Extension educators to make the best recommendations possible.

We understand the impact these actions will have on youth exhibitors and their projects. We are asking that fairs put in place alternative poultry-based competitions to highlight the accomplishments of youth poultry competitors. Penn State Extension has recommended establishing educational poster competitions or birdless showmanship to keep youth engaged in the poultry industry and provide a solution for completing their poultry projects.

For more information on poultry contests and activities that do not require a bird to participate, visit <http://extension.psu.edu/4-h/projects/poultry> or contact Phillip Clauer at pclauer@psu.edu.

We appreciate your cooperation and support as we move forward to ensure the safety of our poultry industry and Pennsylvania agriculture.

Please contact Zach Gihorski, Fair Coordinator, at 717-649-9482 or zgihorski@pa.gov with any questions.

Sincerely,



Russell C. Redding
Acting Secretary



Zach Gihorski
Fair Coordinator

CC: Hannah Smith-Brubaker, Deputy Secretary
Gregory Hostetter, Deputy Secretary
Phillip Clauer, Penn State Extension