United States Poultry Industry to Test all Flocks for Avian Influenza

Concerned about consumer confidence, the American chicken industry has decided to launch an extensive avian influenza testing program as a precautionary measure. The official start date was set for January 16th but testing has been under way for several weeks.

"Through comprehensive testing covering all flocks, chicken companies will add another layer to the multiple barriers that already exist to protect American consumers and continue to ensure safety and quality of the food supply," said Stephen Pretanik, director of science and technology for the National Chicken Council (NCC), the American industry’s trade association. The NCC has many roles in the U.S. chicken industry, including communications, environmental, marketing, poultry health, safety and regulatory.

Members of the NCC raise about 150,000 flocks per year and account for about 95% of the chicken sold in the U.S. A total of 10 billion chickens per year are raised in the U.S.

The new avian influenza program calls for on-farm testing to screen the flocks two weeks before being shipped for processing. In each case, 11 birds will have samples taken – a total of over 1.6 million tests per year.

The program has been put in place by the industry and, as drafted, has been called stricter than the one currently being administered by the government. It will not replace the federal initiative, but rather, will provide an additional buffer. All costs for the program and the lab testing will be absorbed by the companies involved.

Any flock found to have avian influenza of the H5 or H7 varieties will be promptly and humanely destroyed on the farm and disposed of in an environmentally acceptable manner. None of the birds will be sent to the processing plant or otherwise enter the food chain.

Only H5 and H7 are considered “notifiable” under the rules of the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) because they are the only types known to be capable of changing from the mild, “low pathogenic” form of the disease to the “highly pathogenic” form that causes widespread mortality in poultry.

If disease of the H5 or H7 types occurs in a flock, the industry believes that the best way to prevent the disease from spreading, or possibly turning into the highly pathogenic form, is to destroy all the birds in an affected flock, Pretanik said.

Increased testing may very well lead to additional results, especially as low pathogenicity H5 and H7 forms of the virus are naturally occurring in the North American wild waterfowl population.

Consumers on both sides of the border are reminded that the H5N1 virus has not been detected in North America and that the launch of this program does not indicate an increase in risk to human health.

What Canada is Doing

In Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is in the process of developing a survey to assess the prevalence of low pathogenic avian influenza in Canada.

The objectives of the survey are to determine the prevalence of low pathogenic H5 and H7 avian influenza in Canada and to help establish protocols for ongoing avian influenza surveillance. The results of the preliminary survey will be used to assess the risk to the poultry industry and to determine future disease strategy policies.

The survey will be conducted by taking samples from chickens being processed at federal establishments across the country. All samples will be analyzed at the CFIA National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease laboratory in Winnipeg.

Laboratory results will be based on serological (a blood test to detect the presence of antibodies against influenza) data. A positive test would only indicate that birds had been in the presence of avian influenza at one point in their life, not that they were carriers. Once a positive sample is found an additional farm investigation will take place to determine if an avian influenza virus is present on the farm in the new flock that has been placed.

(An extract from the article previously published on page six in the December 2005 / January 2006 issue of Chicken Farmer)
Hong Kong Aftermath: The Final Hours

Ministers agree on declaration that puts the Doha Round back on track

Ministers from the WTO’s 149 member governments approved a declaration that many described as significant progress both since the July 2004 “package” and after six days of intensive negotiations in Hong Kong.

For the chicken industry and the other supply-managed commodities, the final text was a relief because the treatment of sensitive products was not linked to the general tariff reduction formula, as per the previous draft texts.

Although the Hong Kong agreement does not indicate the parameters defining the selection and treatment of the individual sensitive products, options remain available to ensure that chicken products are recognized as sensitive and receive an adequate treatment that would not be damaging to the Canadian chicken industry.

WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy told a press conference late in the evening of the final day, “We have managed to put the Round back on track after a period of hibernation.”

Hong Kong’s Commerce, Industry and Technology Secretary, John Tsang, who chaired the conference, outlined the achievements in the declaration:

• We have secured an end date for all export subsidies in agriculture, even if it is not in a form to everybody’s liking.
• We have an agreement on cotton.
• We have a very solid duty-free, quota-free access for the 32 least-developed country members.
• In agriculture and NAMA (non-agricultural market access), we have fleshed out a significant framework for full modalities.
• And in services, we now have an agreed text that points positively to the way forward.

The declaration was agreed upon after several days of meetings late into the night, the last two continuing into the morning. “It’s been a hard day’s night. And I’ve been working like a dog,” Secretary Tsang said, quoting John Lennon and Paul McCartney.

With the 44-page document now agreed upon, members face intense pressure in the New Year to complete “full modalities” in agriculture and non-agricultural market access by the new deadline they have set for themselves, April 30, 2006. Full modalities are where numbers or figures are applied to the framework agreement to refine the negotiations further.

Compared to the draft forwarded to Hong Kong from Geneva, a number of issues have been settled or partly settled. The most straightforward is the agreement to end export subsidies in agriculture by 2013, but this was a last minute addition.

The Hong Kong declaration makes it clear that the agreed date (2013) is conditional. Loopholes have to be plugged to avoid hidden export subsidies in credit, food aid and the sales of exporting state enterprises.

Another area of concern that saw serious movement was trade facilitation or what has been coined as “aid for trade” which will see the creation of the legal, administrative and physical infrastructures needed to help developing countries participate fully in the global market. The U.S., in particular, has pledged to double their support over the next five years.

For cotton, the elimination is accelerated to the end of 2006. In addition, cotton exports from least-developed countries will be allowed into developed countries without duty or quotas from the start of the period for implementing the new agriculture agreement. Ministers have also agreed to aim to cut trade-distorting domestic subsidies on cotton by more than would normally apply under the new agreement, and to do so more quickly. Cotton would have been a breaking point for the negotiations as the major cotton producers were pushing for more this round and threatened to derail the whole process.

The two sides negotiating this difficult subject paid tribute to each other for what they described as the spirit of compromise: the United States and the four countries pushing for an agreement on cotton (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali).

Key to Canada’s supply-managed sectors of dairy, poultry and eggs is the declaration’s reference to market access for sensitive products. The SM-5 delegation was pleased that the linkage to the general tariff formula was removed from the final text and the new sentence does not limit the possibility of developing an adequate treatment for sensitive products. The new phrase is “we recognize the need to agree on treatment of sensitive products, taking into account all the elements involved”.

Canadian dairy, poultry and egg industries continue to maintain their new website, www.farmsandfood.ca, which provides a wealth of information about supply management and was created to engage and inform Canadian consumers, politicians and media about a system that guarantees them an adequate supply of quality dairy, poultry and eggs.
2006 Election: Agriculture up for Debate

Agriculture was not an issue in the last election and farm groups, including Chicken Farmers of Canada, are working towards making it one for the 2006 Federal Election.

Despite a wealth of other issues, including gun control, health care, education and taxes, to name a few, agriculture needs to move up to the front burner. The livelihoods of thousands of Canadian farm families count on Canada having a stable and strong federal government.

A step in the right direction was the recent debate held in Toronto, Ontario between representatives of the four major political parties. Hosted on January 13\textsuperscript{th} by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) at the University of Toronto, the debate was an opportunity for each party to reassure the farmers that they are, indeed, front and centre on the map.

The debate featured Andy Mitchell, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Conservative Agriculture Critic Diane Finley, NDP Agriculture Critic Charlie Angus, and Bloc Québécois Agriculture Critic André Bellavance.

This time around, questions came from farmers across the country and each party representative had a chance to respond based on the agriculture policy or position of each of their parties.

Some of the themes included:
- increased profitability for farmers
- plans for income disasters like BSE and avian influenza
- WTO negotiations and their potential impact on Canada's agriculture industries
- the rural economy
- the role of the government where it pertains to agriculture

The debate is effective for farmers and farmer representatives because it provides a mechanism where they can hear, first-hand, the plans of each of the parties.

The presence of the Agriculture Minister and agriculture critics is important because agriculture is the focus of the whole debate, which allows more in-depth discussions and more detailed responses.

In particular, the electoral candidates were pressed for their response to the following:

"If elected, will your party honour the unanimous House of Commons motion in favour of supply management passed on November 22, 2005."

It will be interesting to see what impact the debate had on voting patterns, once the results of the January 23\textsuperscript{rd} national election have been tallied.

Eric Meek Inducted into Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame

Eric Meek has always been a man involved in both his industry and his community; he has always given of himself in order to make a difference.

This was recognized by his peers. Nominated by the Chicken Farmers of Nova Scotia for his contributions and leadership in the industry, Eric is a very deserving inductee of the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame in 2005.

The Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame was established in 1968 and has been recognizing individuals from the Maritimes that have made lengthy and important contributions to the ongoing vitality of agriculture in the region. Here is a link to the website where you can see a list of previous inductees: http://nsac.ca/halloffame/

Born in 1933, and growing up on the family farm in Canning, Nova Scotia, Eric attended local schools. Upon his graduation from the Nova Scotia Agricultural College in 1954, he returned to farm with his father full-time. They formed a partnership under the name of L. B. Meek and Son and over the years, they have had layers, broilers, potatoes, peas, beans, forage and grain, ran a beef feed lot and had "U-Pick" vegetables and strawberries.

Eric believed in the future of the agricultural industry and became active in its organization. In 1962, he was elected President of the Kings County Federation of Agriculture. Later, he served on many committees and boards, including the Pea and Bean Marketing Board, Potato Marketing Board, Vegetable and Potato Producers Associations and the Farm Labour Committee.

In 1966, Eric was a founding member of the Nova Scotia Chicken Marketing Board. He was a strong voice of the province's chicken farmers and served diligently on the Board for 24 years, 11 of which were served as Chairman.

A long-time advocate of producer-controlled marketing of farm products, Eric assumed the chairmanship of the Canadian Broiler Council at a time when an effort was being made to establish a national system of production and marketing management for chicken in Canada. In 1977, he spent much of his time traveling across Canada promoting the formation of a national chicken agency.

His hard work and determination paid off when the Canadian Chicken Marketing Agency (now Chicken Farmers of Canada) was formed in 1978. Eric was elected as its first Chairman.
Eric also stayed involved in the local chicken industry and served as President of ACA Co-operative Board of Directors in 1956 and again from 1977-1988. He continued to serve the industry on this Board, retiring in 2003. He was elected to the Co-op Atlantic Board of Directors in 1990 and served nine years, two of those as president.

Also a strong community supporter, Eric has been involved with the Canning Volunteer Fire Department for over 40 years, part of the time as Chief. He was on the Village Board of Directors for almost 30 years, part of the time as President. He has also been involved with the Canning United Baptist Church, Director of the Valley Credit Union and the Annapolis Valley Funeral Home Co-op to name but a few. In 2004, Eric was recognized as one of the top 50 most influential people in the Canadian poultry industry by the Canadian Poultry Magazine.

Eric and his wife Pauline (McMahon) have four children, two of whom are currently involved in the family farm business.

The 2006 Census of Agriculture and Canada’s Poultry and Egg Industries

When farm operators complete their 2006 Census of Agriculture questionnaire on May 16, 2006, they will be updating Canada’s definitive national agricultural profile.

The cooperation of those in the poultry sector in completing their census forms is now more important than ever. Poultry farmers not only face increasing challenges, but such recent crises as the 2004 outbreak of avian influenza add another dose of uncertainty. The census will provide farmers, their organizations and everyone interested in the future of Canadian farming with solid information to quantify the agricultural situation.

Farm numbers have been in steady decline across the country for many years. Between the 1981 and 2001 Censuses, farm numbers declined by 22% overall, to under 247,000 farms. Operations that generated the bulk of their farm receipts from poultry or eggs showed an even greater trend downwards, declining 43% nationally to 4,900 farms. New Brunswick and Saskatchewan experienced the largest declines, while British Columbia experienced the smallest.

Gains in efficiency afforded to farmers by technologial advances are demonstrated nowhere better than in the poultry and egg sectors. Today’s advances in automation, breeding and husbandry would have changed the industry dramatically almost overnight.

Despite the decline in number of poultry and egg farms, inventories of many of these commodities have been on the rise: The number of hens and chickens on Census Day grew by 40% between 1981 and 2001.

This is a reflection on the modernization as well as the overall growth in the chicken industry. Per capita consumption in that same time nearly doubled (16.7 kg per person in 1981 compared to 30.3 kg in 2001). Census Day 2001 noted 26 million laying hens, over 87 million broilers, roasters and Cornish hens, and 8 million turkeys on Canadian farms.

The number of birds per poultry and egg farm on Census Day increased considerably between 1981 and 2001. The average number of layers on egg operations nearly tripled to 10,400, while producers of chickens for meat grew their flocks at a slightly higher rate, reaching 33,500 birds in 2001. Turkey producers experienced the slowest growth, but still managed to nearly double their average flock size to 12,100.

The ability to understand where we are now — and indeed where we have come from — allows us better informed approaches to face tomorrow’s challenges. Participation by producers in the 2006 Census of Agriculture will also allow them to give a local as well as national voice to their present situation, informing Canadians of the crucial role the diverse agricultural sector plays in shaping our national picture.