



United Egg Producers

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Modern U.S. Egg Farm Production Methods Help Protect Against Spread of Avian Influenza

ATLANTA – The presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza in parts of Asia and Europe has raised public concern with the safety of poultry and eggs in Europe and other countries including the United States. The U.S. does not have the type of AI strain that is in Asia and Europe. Modern U.S. farm production methods—whereby poultry is housed indoors under strict biosecurity procedures and surveillance—help prevent the spread of Avian Influenza in the U.S., experts say.

“One of the biggest myths today is that modern farming techniques promote the spread of avian influenza,” said David Swayne, director of Southeastern Poultry Research Laboratory, the country’s largest research effort into avian influenza. “That is not the case.”

“Modern farming techniques actually prevent the spread of avian influenza,” said Jeff Armstrong, dean of the college of agriculture and natural resources, Michigan State University and chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee of United Egg Producers.

In fact, the spread of H5N1 Avian Influenza is most predominant in small villages in Southeast Asia where much of the poultry is raised in open air fields which allow migratory birds to come in contact with domestic poultry, which are then sold live in village markets, Swayne explained. This promotes maintenance of the virus and recurring infections. In addition, the open air fields are more prone to migratory bird infestations which promote the spread of the low pathogenicity virus and more recently, the high pathogenicity H5N1 which is highly fatal to poultry. The majority of the Asia H5N1 outbreaks have occurred among village poultry, primarily domestic ducks.

Almost all eggs produced in the U.S. originate from farms with modern cage production systems in housing that protect the flock from contact with migratory birds, predators, and other diseases. These indoor housing systems also help ensure all birds receive daily sufficient feed, clean air and water. In addition, these conventional cage systems allow farmers to visually inspect hens daily for any health problems or symptoms for immediate attention and treatment. Most U.S. egg production facilities also enforce stringent biosecurity measures and strictly limit contact with humans. Few visitors are allowed in poultry houses to reduce the risk of spreading diseases.

The World Health Organization now is recommending that many Asian and European farmers confine their poultry in houses like most of the poultry is raised in the U.S. The French Ministry of Agriculture has placed a ban on outdoor raising of poultry in 21 regions of the country that are more vulnerable to migratory birds or they have significant areas of lakes and dormant water which attract waterfowl.

The American Association of Avian Pathologists and the American College of Poultry Veterinarians say “The U.S. maintains much higher health standards for birds which are raised in flocks housed in

modern, climate-controlled poultry houses and fed a nutritional formula. The modern type of animal production in the United States is actually more protective of birds, their health and well being than the more traditional systems such as the free running village chickens in Asia.”

“There is a very low potential for migratory bird transmission in the U.S. as birds in Southeast Asia do not directly migrate to the United States,” added Swayne. The U.S. Department of Agriculture continuously monitors migratory bird patterns and regularly tests migratory birds for avian influenza.

There have been no cases of the high pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza virus in wild birds or commercial poultry production in the United States. Proper cooking of any poultry or poultry products would destroy any virus in the very unlikely event that it was present.

The United Egg Producers Certified guidelines for responsible, modern-day egg production were established by an independent scientific committee for the United Egg Producers and are supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These guidelines ensure that hens have scientifically recommended space, continuous access to fresh air and water, nutritious food, are kept clean, are protected from other hens, are transported in a safe and protected manner, and their overall welfare is promoted to the best of the producer’s ability. Adherence to these guidelines is audited by independent inspectors from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. For more information, please visit www.uepcertified.com.

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