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In the News

"Not if, but when": HPAI heading east

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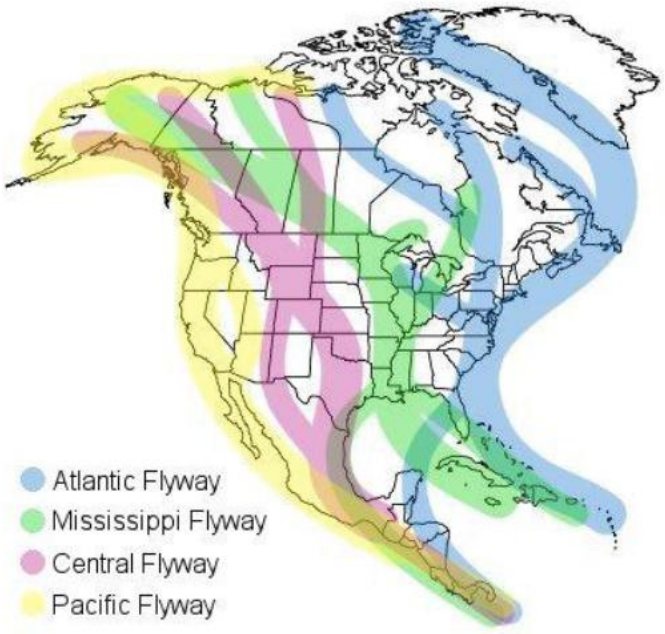
Infected migratory waterfowl that overfly or land in areas with high concentrations of backyard poultry, like the Pacific Northwest, represent high risk for spread of high pathogen avian influenza (HPAI). Backyard and free-range poultry may not be so plentiful further east, but that does not stop wild birds.

The migration paths or flyways of geese, ducks, and other waterfowl often overlap. HPAI can pass from Pacific Flyway birds to those traveling the Mississippi Flyway and across the country.



Now the overriding question is: How long before we can expect HPAI to appear in the Midwest?

Like “canaries in a coal mine,” turkeys can give us early warning of the spread of high pathogen avian influenza (HPAI). It takes about 100 times more virus to infect turkeys than chickens.

On January 25, one house of turkeys on a nine-house farm in California’s Central Valley broke with HPAI H5N8, followed on February 12 by another outbreak of H5N8 in a commercial chicken and duck farm further south in the Valley. These incidents echoed this year’s initial outbreaks in northwestern Canada and demonstrated the current limits of high vigilance and biosecurity to protect U.S. commercial poultry operations from the devastating disease.

If you’re attending the Midwest Poultry Federation Convention in Saint Paul, MN, March 17-19, check out the “Regional Disease Update: Midwest” during the Pullet/Layer Health Workshop (Wednesday, March 18, 8:30-10:30 a.m.).

Also, for background on health issues specifically affecting the egg industry, check out a summary report from the fall 2014 meeting of the U.S. Animal Health Association Annual Update. The report includes:

- Survey results of the Association of Veterinarians in Egg Production (AVEP) to list the top five most prevalent and important diseases of pullets and layers;
- A description of the top diseases and their control measures;
- The top issues and other diseases of concern of the AVEP membership; and
- Research needs for the table egg industry.

Concern about HPAI was on the rise in this October 2014 meeting because of the ongoing threat of H7N3 from Mexico, where the disease was being controlled by vaccination without culling of flocks. Active and passive surveillance programs for avian influenza were active across the U.S. in response to the threat of H7N3 from Mexico and H5N1 from Asia.

The report noted that the threat of H5 or H7 low pathogenic AI (LPAI) for layer flocks on the East coast was much reduced due to the efforts by New York and New Jersey Departments of Agriculture and USDA to reduce the positivity of the live bird markets from 60% positive markets in 2004 to near zero since. A majority of egg operations were complying with the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) LPAI program for commercial layers. No significant AI isolations had been made in layer flocks in the U.S. during 2013 and 2014.

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