

# Bird flu found on at least 15 turkey farms in Midwest

April 10 2015, by Kevin Burbach

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A bird flu strain that's deadly to poultry has been confirmed in a second commercial turkey flock in eastern South Dakota and preliminary tests have confirmed the presence of some form of bird flu at a North Dakota farm, bringing to at least 15 the number of Midwest farms infected in the latest outbreak.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture confirmed the strain of avian influenza in the flock of 34,000 turkeys in Kingsburg County, South Dakota, which sits between Huron and Brookings. The flock is located within the Central flyway where the strain has previously been found.

A North Dakota state veterinary lab on Thursday confirmed the presence of bird flu in a commercial turkey flock but it's still unknown whether it's the highly contagious H5N2 strain.

The North Dakota State University's Veterinary Diagnostic Lab said samples from the flock of 40,000 turkeys in Dickey County tested positive for H5 avian influenza after the owner reported an increase in death rates.

State officials are waiting to get confirmation from the National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, Iowa, on the exact strain of avian influenza. If confirmed, it would be the first case in a commercial operation in North Dakota.

The cases were the latest in a growing outbreak of [bird flu](#), especially the

highly contagious H5N2 strain affecting poultry in multiple states, including nearby Minnesota. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers the risk to people to be low.

So far the total number of outbreaks across the Midwest has reached at least 15, including the new finding in South Dakota. Minnesota has been hit the hardest with nine farms struck by the virus. The disease has killed or forced producers to destroy well over 500,000 birds since early March.

"We do anticipate that we could find additional cases, additional farms infected with highly pathogenic [avian influenza](#)," said Dr. Dustin Oedekoven, the South Dakota state veterinarian.

The first case of the virus in South Dakota was found last week at farm run by a Hutterite colony near Huron in Beadle County.

South Dakota officials on Thursday said they had quarantined the latest farm and that birds on the property would be killed to prevent the spread of the disease.

Oedekoven said all turkeys at the Beadle County farm had been destroyed and that disposal is underway. He said the Kingsbury County farm would begin destroying birds Thursday and hoped they would be done on Friday.

Oedekoven said the state disposes of the carcasses by either burying or composting them.

As a precaution, the state plans to quarantine and test all poultry in a 10-kilometer zone surrounding the latest farm, Oedekoven said. They also plan to do some surveillance in a 20-kilometer zone.

Oedekoven said he's not aware of any commercial turkey flocks in that quarantine zone, but has identified nine locations that have some backyard poultry.

In the No. 1 turkey producing state of Minnesota, U.S. Sen Amy Klobuchar met with turkey producers and said on Thursday that she plans to speak with Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to discuss the federal response to the crisis.

The Minnesota Democrat, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said their discussions focused on federal funds to reimburse producers for part of their losses, how they'll cope with lost production during the eight months it can take before a farm can start raising turkeys again, why this is happening now and how to prevent it.

Experts think migrating waterfowl carried the virus to Minnesota, but haven't proved that yet or determined how it's been getting past tight biosecurity at farms.

"Clearly we need some better guidance, and we need to get to the bottom of it so our producers know what they should do, so it doesn't either happen to them or happen again," she said in an interview with The Associated Press.

The USDA does not compensate farmers for birds killed by the disease itself, but does reimburse them for birds that have to be destroyed as a precaution. Klobuchar said there's enough money for now, but she wants to talk to Vilsack about ensuring adequate funding if the virus keeps spreading.

The senator said she also wants to make it clear to federal officials that other countries should not use the outbreak as an excuse to block U.S. turkey imports. Around 40 countries have blocked imports of Minnesota

turkey products to varying degrees.

While the risk is low and no human has been infected so far, Lon Kightlinger, the South Dakota state epidemiologist, said they are still asking those who are directly exposed to infected birds to self-monitor for 10 days.

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