

Third Minnesota turkey farm hit by bird flu outbreak

March 28 2015, by Steve Karnowski

An outbreak of a bird flu strain that's deadly to poultry deepened Saturday when state and federal officials confirmed a third Minnesota turkey farm has been infected, this time in one of the state's top poultry producing counties.

The federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service said a commercial flock of 39,000 turkeys in Stearns County of central Minnesota has been infected with the highly pathogenic H5N2 strain of avian influenza, which also killed tens of thousands of turkeys at two other farms in Pope and Lac qui Parle counties of western Minnesota.

Saturday's announcement came one day after officials announced the outbreak at the Lac qui Parle County farm, where the virus quickly killed 22,000 of the 12-week-old turkeys in one barn. That farm must kill 44,000 birds in two other barns as a precaution to prevent the disease from spreading.

The confirmation at the Pope County farm on March 5 marked the first detection of H5N2 in the Mississippi Flyway, a major bird migration route. H5N2 was also found within the next several days in commercial and backyard flocks in Arkansas, Missouri and Kansas. The same strain also has turned up in several western states in the Pacific Flyway.

The Stearns County farm has been quarantined and the remaining turkeys there will be killed and kept out of the food supply, according to the Minnesota Board of Animal Health, which said it planned to release

further information Saturday afternoon.

More than 40 countries have banned poultry imports from Minnesota, the country's top turkey producing state, since the virus was first detected in the state.

According to the Minnesota Turkey Growers Association, Stearns County is the state's No. 2 turkey-producing county, behind only Kandiyohi County in western Minnesota, where the virus has not been reported. Stearns County is also one of the state's top chicken and egg producers, according to the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

Scientists consider wild migratory waterfowl to be a natural reservoir for [avian influenza](#). While they don't generally get sick from flu viruses, they can spread them through their droppings. But top researchers say they don't know how the virus got to Minnesota.

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Citation: Third Minnesota turkey farm hit by bird flu outbreak (2015, March 28) retrieved 16 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-minnesota-turkey-farm-bird-flu.html>

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