

Bird flu found on South Dakota egg-laying chicken farm (Update)

May 14 2015, by Kevin Burbach



In this July 9, 2014 photo released by Dakota Layers, a batch of eggs is sprayed with water after entering the processing area of Dakota Layers in Flandreau, S.D. The farm is the first in the chicken-production business in the state to be infected with a deadly flu virus despite efforts to prevent it, state and farm officials said Thursday, May 14, 2015. (Tracy Ramsdell/Dakota Layers via AP)

An eastern South Dakota farm with 1.3 million egg-laying chickens is the first in the chicken-production business in the state to be infected

with a deadly flu virus despite efforts to prevent it, state and farm officials said Thursday.

Flandreau-based Dakota Layers, which accounts for nearly half of the state's almost 2.7 million egg-laying chickens, reached out to the state veterinarian Wednesday after it noticed an unusual number of dead birds in one of its nine barns.

A South Dakota State University lab confirmed the presence of the highly pathogenic H5 avian influenza virus. Officials hadn't confirmed yet Thursday whether it was the H5N2 strain. If so, then the virus will have led to the deaths of more than 33 million chickens and turkeys in the Midwest, primarily at farms in neighboring Minnesota and Iowa.

South Dakota State Veterinarian Dustin Oedekoven said crews would begin euthanizing the chickens after they determined how best to handle the largest outbreak the state has seen thus far.

Dakota Layers' Chief Executive Officer Scott Ramsdell said in a statement Thursday that Dakota Layers had taken "extensive biosecurity measures" over the last two months to prevent an outbreak in their barns.

"Unfortunately, as many poultry farms are discovering, even our extraordinary measures proved ineffective in preventing the spread of avian influenza into one of our barns," Ramsdell said.

Dakota Layers produces more than 90,000 dozens of eggs daily and ships about 70 percent of its eggs to California. Agriculture officials have stressed there is no danger to the supply and very low risk to humans.



In this July 9, 2014 photo released by Dakota Layers, batches of eggs move through the processing area of Dakota Layers in Flandreau, S.D. The farm is the first in the chicken-production business in the state to be infected with a deadly flu virus despite efforts to prevent it, state and farm officials said Thursday, May 14, 2015. (Tracy Ramsdell/Dakota Layers via AP)

Oedekoven said it was disappointing to see a large-scale operation lose its birds after taking all the appropriate precautions.

"It's a big loss, it's a big hit," he said.

Officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture were on site Thursday to evaluate the operation and work with the state in figuring out how to proceed. Bird flu has already been found at eight turkey farms in South Dakota—affecting almost 500,000 birds—but none of this magnitude.



This Oct. 5, 2014, aerial photo released by Dakota Layers, shows the Dakota Layers Egg Laying Facility in Flandreau, S.D. The farm is the first in the chicken-production business in the state to be infected with a deadly flu virus despite efforts to prevent it, state and farm officials said Thursday, May 14, 2015. (Tracy Ramsdell/Dakota Layers via AP)

The hens would likely be humanely euthanized with carbon dioxide gas, Oedekoven said, but the state hasn't yet decided how to dispose of the carcasses. Officials have primarily been burying turkey carcasses in addition to composting them.

"It's not pleasant work, but we've had great cooperation with our industry and we hope they can make it through this," Oedekoven said. "We'll proceed as best we can and continue to hope for the end of this plague."

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