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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **OHIO TAKING PROACTIVE EFFORT TO REMAIN FREE OF DEADLY AVIAN FLU AS OTHER STATES STRUGGLE WITH EFFECTS OF VIRUS**

REYNOLDSBURG, Ohio (June 2, 2015) – In an aggressive move designed to help protect Ohio’s \$2.3 billion poultry industry from the avian flu that has so negatively impacted other poultry-producing states, today the Ohio Department of Agriculture canceled all live bird exhibitions this year. The ban includes county and independent fairs, the Ohio State Fair, and all other gatherings of birds for show or for sale, including auctions and swap meets. Similar bans have been enacted in other poultry states. So far, Ohio is virus-free and the move is intended to continue that status.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI)—also called the avian flu – is an extremely contagious virus that primarily affects domestic poultry and is believed to be spread by wild, migrating birds. The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) first confirmed the virus in the U.S. beginning in late 2014. Since that time more than 44 million birds at more than 197 locations have been affected.

“This was a difficult decision because it means young people can’t show their birds at fairs, but it’s in the best interest of an industry that literally thousands of Ohio families and businesses depend on and which provides billions of dollars to our state’s economy. The right move isn’t always the easy move, but this is the right move, especially when you see just how devastating the virus has been to other big poultry states like Iowa and Minnesota. Ohioans need to do all we can to ensure that we protect our industry and that we help avoid a costly spike in the price of important foods like chicken, turkey and eggs,” said Ohio Department of Agriculture Director David T. Daniels.

Ohio is the second largest egg producer in the country and home to 28 million laying chickens, 12 million broilers, 8.5 million pullets and 2 million turkeys. Ohio’s egg, chicken and turkey farms employ more than 14,600 jobs and contribute \$2.3 billion to the state’s economy. Ohio’s role in national poultry production is even greater considering the loss that other major poultry states are experiencing.

“One of the ways avian influenza spreads is by direct contact with contaminated materials coming from other infected birds. This means that exhibitions, auctions and swap meets where birds are co-mingling pose a high risk of unintentionally spreading this disease. Until we can be sure that there has been no transference from the wild bird population migrating through the state, we need to do all we can to minimize the exposure for our domestic birds,” said State Veterinarian Dr. Tony Forshey.

Similar concern about the potential spread of disease that can happen when birds are brought together for shows and sales has caused Ohio’s neighboring states of Indiana, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Michigan to make the decision to cancel shows for at least the 2015 fair season. Of those states, only Indiana has had a flock test positive for HPAI.

The Ohio Department of Agriculture is working closely with the state's poultry producers and the USDA APHIS to provide training and to closely monitor the health of poultry in the state. Detailed plans and protocols are in place to allow for a quick and coordinated response in the event HPAI is detected in Ohio.

### **Human health and food safety**

Despite the severity of the outbreak in birds, no human infections have been associated with HPAI and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers the risk to people from these viruses to be low. Federal and state law already ensures birds and poultry products that are affected by HPAI are prohibited from entering the food chain.

Consumers should continue to employ standard food safety practices. Cooking poultry, including game birds, to the proper temperature and preventing cross contamination between raw and cooked food are always recommended to protect against viruses and bacteria.

### **Recommendations for local fairs**

The department is working with county and independent fair boards to identify options that will keep youth who are already raising poultry from losing their opportunity to have a fair project. The recommendations include amending the deadlines for students to switch projects and allowing the use of props or photos in place of live birds.

"The experience of raising a live animal to show at the fair builds character and teaches responsibility. We don't want to deprive anyone the opportunity to complete their projects. For that reason, we are working with Ohio State University Extension to send out guidance to the fair boards and 4-H committees urging them to be creative and find a solution that will allow their young people to still have a fair experience, even if they cannot bring their project to the fairgrounds," said Director Daniels.

### **Biosecurity recommendations for poultry owners**

Dr. Forshey is reminding all bird owners, whether commercial producers or backyard enthusiasts, to continue to practice good biosecurity, prevent contact between their birds and wild birds, keep birds inside as much as possible, and report sick birds or unusual bird deaths to their veterinarian immediately.

Good biosecurity practices for poultry owners include the following:

- **Monitor flocks** for unusual signs of illness such as "snicking" (sneezing), a 1 percent or more decrease in egg production, or an increase in mortality. Other signs to look for are wheezing, lethargy, and depression.
- **Practice personal biosecurity** and avoid contact with sick/dead poultry or wildlife. If contact occurs, wash your hands with soap and water and change clothing before having any contact with healthy domestic poultry and birds.
- **Keep unauthorized visitors from having contact** with poultry, a good practice whether or not there is a disease threat. Authorized persons should be required to wear protective clothing and shoes before entering a commercial poultry house.
- **Avoid contact between your birds and wild birds** whenever possible due to the migratory nature of HPAI. These virus strains can travel in wild birds without them appearing sick.

- **Clean and disinfect** farm vehicles or equipment before moving them on and off your property.

Sick birds or unusual bird deaths should also be immediately reported to the Ohio Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health at 1-614-728-6220 or through USDA APHIS's toll-free number at 1-866-536-7593. Additional information on biosecurity from USDA APHIS for backyard flocks can be found at <http://healthybirds.aphis.usda.gov> or by visiting [www.ohioagriculture.gov](http://www.ohioagriculture.gov).

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