



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

EGG INDUSTRY RECOVERY UNDERWAY IN IOWA

Farmers, communities making progress toward resumption of egg production

URBANDALE, IA (August 7, 2015): Together with their employees, families and communities, Iowa's egg farmers are looking toward the future and to fully resuming egg production in the state following the devastating avian influenza (AI) crisis that took place in the spring of this year.

The disease moved rapidly through the state's egg and poultry farms, resulting in a loss of about 40 percent of Iowa's egg laying flocks. Iowa, which ranks number one in the nation for egg production, had its first positive finding of AI in April 2015 and to date has lost more than 30 million egg-laying hens and pullets (hens less than one year old).

"There is no doubt that this has been an unprecedented crisis for Iowa's egg farming community, and one that has taken a terrible emotional and financial toll on our farmers," said Randy Olson, executive director, Iowa Poultry Association (IPA). "The resilience of our farmers and their commitment to recovery cannot be understated – they are working tirelessly to fully and swiftly restore egg production in our state and to minimize continued disruption in the egg market."

IPA and its farmer-members welcomed news from the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, which this week announced plans to lift the vast majority of control zones that were established around premises in Iowa infected with HPAI.

Initial recovery actions

Olson said affected farms are making good progress toward resuming egg production, but that a full restoration of the industry in Iowa could take more than a year. Initial work in the recovery process is well underway on the vast majority of the state's egg farms, with a specific focus on:

- Full cleaning and disinfection of farm buildings, equipment and housing;
- Ongoing engagement with federal and state agencies assisting with the recovery operations;
- Reestablishment and enhancement of robust on-farm biosecurity and disease prevention programs;
- Thorough testing of barns and the farm environment to assure no disease pathogens are present prior to reintroduction of birds to the farm; and
- Repopulation of flocks and the production of safe, high-quality, nutritious eggs.

“We are so appreciative of the prayers and support we have received in our community – from local elected leaders to volunteers, and from our employees to our families, everyone has played a role in helping us navigate this difficult time for our farms,” said Bruce Dooyema, egg farmer, Dooyema and Sons.

“Disease prevention has never been more important for egg farming in Iowa, and we have an intensive focus on increasing biosecurity protocols to help keep AI from reentering our farms,” said Rich Hall, Chairman, Iowa Egg Council, and general manager, Southwest Iowa Egg Cooperative. “We’ll do whatever is necessary to protect our flocks and to ensure our family can continue to produce wholesome safe eggs.”

Full recovery over time

Egg production on commercial farms operates in phases based on the ages of egg-laying hens, to provide continuity in supply and to best manage flocks. Iowa egg farms will repopulate individual farms in stages, with some dependency on the availability of hatching chicks and pullets to stock barns. Egg supplies are expected to increase gradually over the next 12 to 18 months as more barns are filled with new birds and to stagger the ages of new flocks.

“Restoring Iowa’s egg industry to its pre-AI levels will take some time, but egg farmers are committed to maintaining an aggressive timeline toward full production, in cooperation with USDA and state officials,” said Olson. “We appreciate the ongoing support of Iowa’s elected leaders— including Iowa Governor Terry E. Branstad and Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey – who stepped up in support of our industry and are laying the groundwork for our recovery.” Olson said egg farmers recognize their responsibility to put expanded and robust biosecurity measures in place on their farms, in anticipation of possible recurrence of AI in the fall or next spring.

In all, the AI outbreak nationwide has resulted in the loss of nearly 35 million laying hens and about six million pullets, or about 12 percent of all flocks. To learn more about avian influenza and Iowa’s response, visit IowaEgg.org.

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Note to media: Interviews available on request. While we appreciate the interest in access to Iowa farms, egg producers affected by AI remain focused on cleanup and repopulation planning. Further, enhanced biosecurity protocols are being implemented on farms to prevent recurrence of the disease. Farm tours and individual producer interviews will not be available at this time.