



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WSDA seeks volunteers for avian influenza surveillance testing of backyard flocks

OLYMPIA – Officials of the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) announced today an expansion of its surveillance efforts to detect avian influenza in the state’s domestic poultry, particularly backyard flocks that may be exposed to migratory waterfowl.

WSDA is looking for farmers and backyard poultry owners with established flocks who will allow WSDA to take swab samples from live birds or provide eggs for testing. Participants will be reimbursed up to \$60 per quarter for providing swab samples or \$10 a quarter for providing a dozen eggs to test for the avian influenza virus. WSDA staff will do the quick and painless swabbing and egg pickup during visits to the premises.

“Avian influenza hasn’t been found in domestic poultry in Washington, but it will be an advantage to increase the range of our surveillance efforts,” said State Veterinarian Leonard Eldridge. “These sentinel flocks will help alert us should avian influenza ever become a problem here. Good surveillance and early detection will allow us to coordinate a rapid response to bird diseases.”

The department is particularly interested in testing chickens, pheasants, ducks and geese located near a wildlife or waterfowl refuge, close to commercial poultry operations or within a major migratory waterfowl flyway.

Persons interested in participating in the backyard flock surveillance may contact WSDA through its toll-free Avian Health Hotline at 1-800-606-3056. The hotline also can be used to report sick or dead birds or ask for more information on avian influenza.

As part of a national surveillance program, state and federal agencies continue to test domestic and wild birds for avian influenza, including strains that may transmit to domestic poultry. No case of highly pathogenic avian influenza, which is deadly to birds, has ever been discovered in Washington.

Last year, WSDA sent more than 4,000 bird swabs or eggs to the Washington State University (WSU) Avian Health Laboratory in Puyallup. None of the tests showed signs of avian influenza. Commercial poultry operations conduct their own surveillance and testing as part of their normal biosecurity and disease prevention programs.

WSDA is using U.S. Department of Agriculture funds through a cooperative agreement to support voluntary testing and outreach efforts. Other WSDA activities include making avian influenza sampling kits available to WSU Extension and select veterinary offices, and printing a calendar with avian health information.

The public may also report diseased or dead wild birds, particularly waterfowl or shorebirds, to the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife at 1-800-606-8768.

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