

Working to Secure our Food Supply

By Rep. Dan Moul (R-Adams)

For farmers, success depends largely on the weather and the good health of their herds and flocks. While taking precautions and planning for lean times are sensible strategies for any of us, it is particularly important in an industry as vulnerable as agriculture.

In Pennsylvania, we are now witnessing a prime example of that vulnerability with the recent outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Commonly referred to as Avian Flu or “bird flu,” HPAI is highly transmissible, and an outbreak means the entire flock must be destroyed at great cost to the farmer. Farmers must also disinfect affected barns and holding facilities and let them sit idle for several weeks before re-populating them.

Pennsylvania’s poultry industry contributes significantly to our state’s economy while providing an important food source. The destruction of entire flocks of chickens can have a devastating impact on local farmers and the prices consumers pay for chicken and eggs.

The difficulty in controlling HPAI is that it is being spread by wild migratory birds. State officials at all levels are working to address the need for adequate monitoring and prevention of bird flu as well as action to control it when an outbreak occurs.

After a historic outbreak of HPAI in the 1980s that had a devastating impact on Pennsylvania’s poultry industry and economy, efforts to provide for surveillance and mitigation were implemented. The Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission was established by the state Legislature in 1988, providing Pennsylvania farmers with the expertise of animal health specialists, diagnostic testing labs and the ability to identify disease outbreaks before they spread and reach crisis levels. Having such a resource in state resulted in the swift and successful mitigation of outbreaks of HPAI here in the 1990s, which saved poultry producers and consumers tens of thousands of dollars.

However, Gov. Tom Wolf’s 2022-23 state budget proposal would eliminate critical funding for the commission, which conducts essential in-state research, testing and surveillance of livestock and poultry diseases. These surveillance efforts are crucial to a quick response and to prevent the spread of deadly diseases like HPAI. Efforts to defund the commission would leave us blind to diseases that threaten animal health and our food supply.

Throughout the month of June, state lawmakers will be acting to finalize the annual state budget. As chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, I am working with my colleagues in the General Assembly to restore this critical funding and the vital resources it provides. In doing so, we will ensure the agriculture industry and our food supply are protected.

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