



MDARD to Fund Research on Bird Flu Outbreak Among Mich. Dairy Herds

Michael C. Zahrt

Foster Swift Agricultural Law News E-blast

June 20, 2024

In the wake of a two-month-old statewide outbreak of the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) has announced it will fund research for eligible state dairy farms impacted by the outbreak. State dairy farms participating in the study will work with investigators from MDARD and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Veterinary Services to complete epidemiological studies with their herds in real-time.

Detected in 25 Michigan dairy herds and more than 65 herds across 12 states, this spring's HPAI outbreak threatens the state's dairy stock and has the potential to infect humans and mutate. So far, only three human cases of the virus (also called H5N1) have been confirmed, with two of those in Michigan. All were dairy workers and their symptoms were minor and short-lived.

Considerations for Michigan Dairy Farm Operators

In May 2024, MDARD issued an emergency order requiring all state dairy operations to adopt enhanced biosecurity measures to reduce the spread and risk of HPAI. This includes daily health monitoring of all animals, monitoring and controlling animal movement, isolating new or returning animals and detailed instructions for cleaning and disinfecting equipment.

Although MDARD, the USDA and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are involved in monitoring and containing the outbreak, top state and federal officials are still working to fully understand the breadth of this latest bird flu outbreak in Michigan's and the nation's dairy herds.

To date, MDARD's effort to track and contain HPAI in the state's dairy herd has been the most comprehensive in the country. However, its continuing success depends entirely on the cooperation and participation of dairy farm operators.

AUTHORS/ CONTRIBUTORS

Michael C. Zahrt

PRACTICE AREAS

Agri-Business

Family Owned Businesses

Health Care



The hesitance to cooperate with government-mandated surveillance and tracking is understandable. But, as the state and country continue to face a growing HPAI threat, we strongly recommend full cooperation with state and federal agencies in all efforts to protect Michigan's dairy industry. One of the top ten milk-producing states, the dairy industry in Michigan contributes \$15 billion a year to the economy and employs over 40,000 people.

Outlook for Containing HPAI: Hopeful, But Proceeding with Caution

While the U.S. has responded to bird flu outbreaks in the poultry industry for decades, the outbreak among dairy cows is a new and vastly different challenge.

MDARD Director Tim Boring says that Michigan is working hard to head off a potentially devastating blow to the state's dairy industry and keep the virus from spreading to more of the human population. But it hasn't been easy.

According to Boring, "It's a tough situation. There's still a lot we don't know. We're learning every day."

Foster Swift's **Agri-Business practice group** is monitoring the outbreak's impact on the state and national dairy industries, along with the efforts to combat HPAI initiated by MDARD, USDA and the CDC. If you have questions about your dairy's participation in the ongoing biosecurity measures, the testing of farm employees or any other issue concerning the HPAI outbreak, please contact Mike Zahrt at mzahrt@fosterswift.com or 616-726-2223.

ADDITIONAL HPAI RESOURCES FOR MICH. DAIRY FARM OPERATIONS

- **Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD)** – MDARD is a critical first point of contact. They will send a veterinarian and offer guidance on quarantine and biosecurity measures. They can also help with financial assistance programs, now available for HPAI-impacted farms. www.michigan.gov/mdard
 - **Michigan State University Extension** – This organization can provide resources and information specifically tailored to farmers dealing with HPAI. www.canr.msu.edu
 - **Your Veterinarian** – They are your on-the-ground resource and can advise you on the immediate health of your animals and the next steps after you suspect an HPAI case.
-