Industry Concerns with Avian Influenza Response Plans

or

“We have met the enemy and he is us.”
(apologies to Walt Kelly)

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The Bird Flu PanicDemic:
What to Fear, What Not to Fear

UTCVM / CEM 610 / Seminars in Molecular, Clinical, and Public Health Epidemiology
April 19, 2006

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I used to give a presentation circa 2006 in which I named the “Bird Flu PanicDemic”, explaining that while Avian Influenza did pose some threat to both humans and poultry, the dangers were wildly exaggerated by the media and in common perception.

Today’s technology and surveillance are much greater than in those days, but now I am the one panicking as I think of how the next big Avian Influenza event will turn out.
o The title says “Industry Concerns”. I don’t know if that is true.
o These are my concerns. They should be carefully considered by both industry and government so that we can improve our response plans (or ignored so I can say, “I told you so!”, when it all goes bad.)
o LPAI and HPAI events involve industry, state governments, and the federal government. In the past, they tended to be industry events with varying amounts of state and government involvement.
o Now they are massive state/federal undertakings with the major stakeholder (the poultry industry) at risk of being a buffeted pawn rather than a key participant.
o All parties are well-intentioned but I worry that we are setting ourselves up for failure when next faced with a serious emergency poultry disease situation.
My concerns were elicited by the two recent LPAI events (small commercial turkey flock in Maryland and auction birds in Delaware).

My main worries are:

- The decreasing incident management by industry in favor of state and federal officials.
- Overly complex and tortuous state plans.
- Lack of discretionary and delegated authority for Incident Commanders and operational team leaders.
- Certification madness; with all testing, disinfectants, participants too prescriptively defined.
- Desire to plan for every eventuality rather than simply being prepared.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LESSONS</th>
<th>WARNINGS</th>
<th>TASKS</th>
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<td>Due to increased complexity of state plans and increased state/federal oversight, two relatively minor incidents disrupted and threatened a large portion of the USA turkey and broiler industries.</td>
<td>Incidents much less severe (disease-wise) than past events, could damage the poultry industry much more.</td>
<td>State, Federal, and Industry need to immediately review State Plans.</td>
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<td>Overly detailed and complex plans, put Incident Commanders in a bind with little flexibility to rely on veterinary discretion.</td>
<td>Same as above.</td>
<td>Same as above. Re-write with more discretionary flexibility to incident commanders.</td>
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<td>Both farm parties involved lacked veterinary representation and there is some question if they and their birds enjoyed adequate advocacy.</td>
<td>Everybody with an animal should have a veterinarian-of-record.</td>
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<td>Because of a challenging situation (high density of market age birds and inflexible state plan), IC was forced to work through exceptions and send birds to market with AI testing pending.</td>
<td>You don’t want to be at the podium during the press conference when we send birds with a positive LPAI isolate to market.</td>
<td>Don’t send birds to market with AI tests pending. Write plans to reduce this likelihood.</td>
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<td>Practice of using ELISA for meat bird AI clearance and AGID only to rule out screening positives on ELISA is standard practice almost everywhere due to higher frequency of false positives with AGID.</td>
<td>Serology for AI clearance of meat turkeys is asking for trouble. Using AGID instead of ELISA for this is even less sensible.</td>
<td>Run antigen testing for meat bird AI clearance with, at most, targeted usage of ELISA.</td>
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<td>Uninhibited drawing of quarantine circles has unintended consequences of hindering chick/poult placement and/or bird movement even when risk is very low.</td>
<td>An incident involving lots of backyard tracebacks/traceforwards could paralyze a region, even though there could actually be zero or very little LPAI.</td>
<td>Decouple backyard and auction compartments from commercial compartment. Clear epilinks should be pursued but coupling these two compartments is not supported by past evidence.</td>
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<td>We look harder than anyone else for LPAI. No surprise that we find more.</td>
<td>No good deed goes unpunished.</td>
<td>NCC and NTF and NPIP need to re-examine the current 100% testing protocols.</td>
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<td>The more information made readily available by email reduces the need for conference calls.</td>
<td>If everyone is paralyzed waiting for the next conference call, we are not effectively utilizing technology.</td>
<td>Electronic communication should be used more than concalls or face-to-face meetings.</td>
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<td>Desire for over zealous testing puts everyone and the birds in a bind.</td>
<td>Don’t send in massive samples just to satisfy scientific curiosity. Sampling and testing should focus on determining positive or negative status.</td>
<td>USDA needs to negotiate better trade arrangements with countries regarding OIE reporting and AI detection, especially with those countries which have less strict testing and reporting requirements than do we (which would be all of them).</td>
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<td>Ambiguous test results are one of the major causes of prolonged events.</td>
<td>Re-testing of “suspect” samples rather than re-sampling will paint us into a corner one day from which we will have difficulty in escaping.</td>
<td>“Suspect Positive” results (and samples) should be thrown out and the flock re-sampled, rather than just re-testing the suspect sample, delaying movements and extending quarantines.</td>
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<td>Counties and addresses are not locations. They increase anxiety and slow effective responses.</td>
<td>If we don’t increase transparency, we will lose credibility among ourselves.</td>
<td>Use decimal lat/lon coordinates. There is no excuse for anything else.</td>
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<td>We already know how to get to Carnegie Hall.</td>
<td>We have done more paperwork than beta-testing with the new plans compared to the old plans.</td>
<td>A few tabletops might open our eyes as to the tasks we’ve set for ourselves. Keep those IC structures current!</td>
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Shapiro / redacted VPDTF Meeting Presentation Notes / June 19, 2014 / regarding recent MD and DE LPAI incidents
These are serious times. Many important questions must be asked.
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What is the truth about Avian Influenza?
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What is the truth about Avian Influenza?

Is that a worm?
Having lost sight of our objective, we redoubled our efforts.

- Anonymous

- Often muttered repeatedly by David Shapiro