

Ross Mosteller
District Extension Agent, Livestock & Natural Resources

HPAI Detection in Kansas Dairy Herds

There has been a buzz in the news recently about cows getting sick on dairies in the southwestern part of the United States. Early this week confirmation has come that “Bird Flu” has been confirmed in Kansas Dairy herds. There is no immediate concern to human health, but I felt it would be good to use my news column space to share a press release from our Department of Agriculture.

MANHATTAN, Kan. — The Kansas Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA– APHIS), has identified highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in two commercial dairy operations. These are the first cases of HPAI in commercial dairy operations in Kansas. Initial testing by the National Veterinary Services Laboratories has not found changes to the virus that indicate mammal-to-mammal transmission, indicating that the risk to the public remains low.

At this stage, there is no concern about the safety of the commercial milk supply or that this circumstance poses a risk to consumer health. The pasteurization process of heating milk to a high temperature ensures milk and dairy products can be safely consumed, as confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). In line with long-standing policy, the CDC does not recommend consuming unpasteurized milk or raw milk. Pasteurization has continually proven to successfully inactivate bacteria and viruses, like influenza, in milk. Dairies are also required to only allow milk from healthy animals to enter the food supply chain.

Also, routine testing and well-established protocols for U.S. dairy will continue to ensure that only safe milk enters the food supply. In keeping with the federal Grade “A” Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO), milk from sick cows must be collected separately and is not allowed to enter the food supply chain. This means affected dairy cows are segregated, as is normal practice with any animal health concern, and their milk does not enter the food supply.

Consumers in the United States and around the world can remain confident in the safety and quality of U.S. dairy. We continue to encourage all dairy producers to closely monitor their herd and contact their local veterinarian immediately if cattle appear infected. Symptoms are mostly restricted to late-stage lactating cows and include a drop-in milk production, loss of appetite, and changes in manure consistency. We encourage dairy producers to minimize wildlife access to their dairy cattle’s water and feed sources.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment works to protect and improve the health of all Kansans. The agency has been notified of the findings and will monitor the situation as they did for HPAI when it was found in the poultry industry.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture is dedicated to serving Kansas farmers, ranchers, agribusinesses and the consumers/customers they serve while promoting public health and safety, protecting animal health, and providing consumer protection and food safety to the best of our ability.

— Kansas Department of Agriculture