

PHILIPPINES CONTINUES TO BE FREE OF BIRD FLU



As the bird flu epidemic continues to rage worldwide, the Philippines has managed to remain free of the virus.

More than securing the Filipinos' health and wellness, the Philippines' accomplishment against the bird flu epidemic is seen as a distinctive national achievement.

The virus has spread globally and several cases had been reported in Asian countries such as Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Russia, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam. In Asia alone, there are already 227 human infections resulting in 142 deaths. Hence, these countries are forced to execute extreme measures to manage the situation.

Mass executions of commercially-raised fowls and banning of importation of poultry and products have lead to enormous losses to the economy and food supply of these countries.

According to a report by Dr. Rose Antegro of the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI), an Avian Influenza (AI) incident in the Philippines may cause severe financial losses due to: (a) increase of fowl and human deaths due to the disease itself or the radical "stamping out" or massive decimation of fowl population to control its spread; (b) drastic drop in consumption of chicken / eggs due to consumer panic; and (c) loss of growing export market.

In addition, she stated that overall net effects may lead to: (a) rise in prices of pork, fish and other food items; (b) loss of market of corn

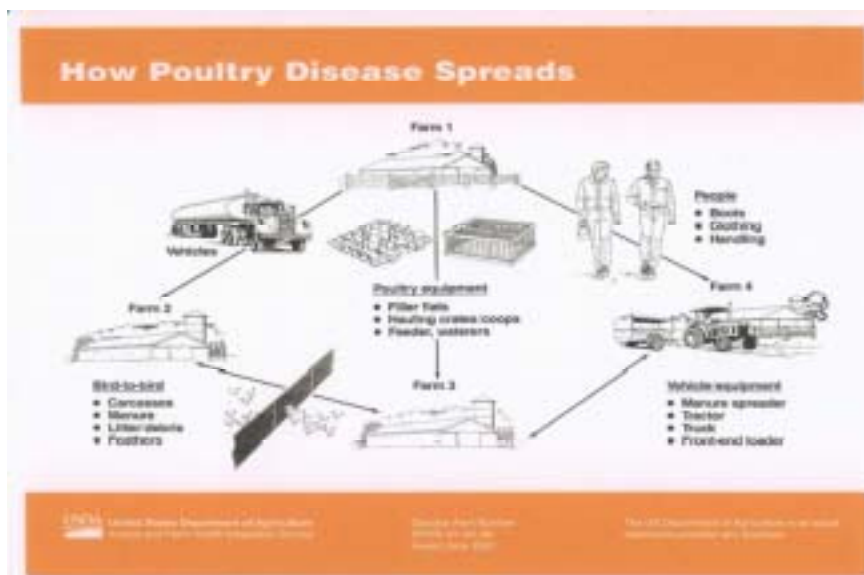
producers and other raw material suppliers; and (c) threat to human health.

Facing the Avian-Flu Threat

AI or bird flu is a contagious disease of birds caused by Type A strains of the influenza virus.

Dr. Antegro stated that the virus may spread among birds through direct contact with discharges from infected birds and through broken contaminated eggs inside incubators. Within a country, the virus may swell through: (a) freely roaming domestic birds; (b) contaminated equipments, cages, feeds and clothing; (c) overly crowded and unsanitary wet markets; (d) trading and smuggling of infected birds.

And though the virus may not be obtained through well-cooked foods, it may be transferred from birds to



How Poultry Disease Spreads

humans via physical contact. In turn, humans may transmit it to each other. Infection may lead to acute respiratory illnesses and death.

As of now, direct infection can occur when the virus passes from poultry to humans. According to the World Health Organization, the greatest threat is when the virus, if uncontrolled, could develop into a form that is highly infectious for humans and spreads easily from person to person. This change can result in a pandemic, or a global outbreak.

Because of the scale, health and economic implications of the threat, the Philippines has devised the Avian Influenza Protection Program (AIPP) under the National Avian Influenza Task Force (NAITF) to combat the entry and spread of the virus. There are four Highlights of the Disease Prevention and Eradication Protocols of the AIPP, these are: **Stage 1:** Keeping the Philippines Bird Flu-Free; **Stage 2:** Control and Eradication of Bird Flu-Free; **Stage 3:** Control of Transmission from Fowl to Human; **Stage 4:** Mitigation of Public Health and Socio Economic Impact of Avian Influenza.

Dr. Antegro added that actions taken to combat the virus include: the identification of bird flu “hot spots” in the country; creative posters and TV commercials; the strict monitoring of wildlife trade and ban on importation of exotic birds; intensive surveillance of migratory birds; duck raising protocols; and the purchase of laboratory equipments.



Generally, the above-mentioned actions are included in these programs:

- Ban on importation from AI-Affected Countries
- Enforcement of Wildlife
- Preventive Measures in Humans
- Upgrading AI Diagnostic Capability
- Preparedness from the National and Local Level

- Information, Education and Communication (IEC)
- Minimum Biosecurity Measures
- Quarantine and Border Control in Airports and Seaports
- Establishment of Compartmentalized Poultry Zones
- Surveillance in identified Critical Areas

AIPP is designed to involve not only concerned government agencies including the BAI. Since its

IEC Changing Behavior Goals		
Families in hot spots & high-risk groups	Adopt preventive behaviors	To limit the spread of flu.
Media practitioners	Report more accurately and more frequently	To inform public about the bird flu.
Focal communication officers	Use the strategic communication plan	To sustain the Stay Bird Flu Free campaign

main focus is on communication and behavior change, it also taps private organizations and individuals.

Furthermore, the efforts to keep the country bird flu-free is supported by international organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), New Zealand’s International Aid and Development Authority (NZAID), Japan’s Special Trust Fund Programme (JTF) the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

So far, the collaboration of the national government, private sectors and international organizations is successful in preventing the entrance of AI in the Philippines. With this, authorities are proud to announce that, here, “it is safe to eat manok.” - *John Anthony Geronimo*

Sources:
[Bird Flu Updates \(Bureau of Animal Industry, Philippines; January 2007 Special Edition\)](#)

[Presentations from the Orientation of “Stay Bird Flu-Free Philippines;” March 27, 2007; PIA Conference Room, 3rd Floor, PIA Bldg., Visayas Avenue, Diliman, Q.C.](#)