

## Industry coment

**Avian influenza – bird flu – is a concern to any in bird production, whether organic or conventional. Organic industry members give their reaction to the news of a possible outbreak in Australia.**



**Brian Shailer, organic chicken producer, Barlil Pty Ltd**

We can't prevent the disease entering the country and it is up to every individual farm to look at biosecurity measures to keep flocks from contamination. A farmer may be liable if they allow the disease to spread. We are currently conducting trials for improving biosecurity to address these

risks. If avian Influenza arrives in Australia, we may not be able to allow birds to free range outdoors, and a solution needs to be looked at from an organic standards point of view. The standard will need to allow for hens to range freely in sheds rather than outdoors.

**John Wylie, owner, Inglewood Farms organic poultry farm**

We take the threat very seriously but try to keep it in perspective. In Europe the impact on the chicken industry has been small – the 20,000 or so birds that have been destroyed is minuscule. The risk of the influenza spreading to Australia is relatively low and the chances of humans catching the disease is less than one in a million. However we are obviously concerned about consumer perceptions influencing demand and the possibility of the virus mutating. We like to think our geographic isolation from the main production centres might be an advantage. We also have a radar-based bird deterrent system which will scare migratory birds away from our flocks. Our main response has been a financial one, seeking insurance avenues and securing additional cash resources to carry us through a period of production down time.



**Michael Sommerlad, Poultry Works, member of the BFA Standards Committee and BFA advisor on poultry issues.**

I would urge all those involved in poultry production to seek out the pertinent facts rather than rely on media releases. For example, great emphasis is placed on the potential for migratory birds to introduce the disease into Australia. Yet rarely does one hear the fact that all five recorded outbreaks of HPAI (highly pathogenic avian influenza) in Australia were not caused by a strain of the disease carried by wild birds. As a type A virus, avian influenza has a number of interesting characteristics, among which are its ability to change (via processes known as "antigenic shift" and "antigenic drift"), which complicates monitoring and vaccine development. HPAI has the potential to devastate poultry industries across the globe. Because it is ubiquitous in waterfowl populations worldwide, poultry producers – particularly those who free range their birds – would be well advised to better understand this disease and manage their flocks accordingly. ■

### USEFUL WEB SITES

- **Animal Health Australia** has produced a simple facts sheet for minimising the risks of spreading disease in flocks; see < [www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au](http://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au) >. The same fact sheet is available on the BFA web site.
- **Australian Egg Corporation** < [www.aecd.org.au](http://www.aecd.org.au) >.
- Australian Government **Department of Health and Ageing** < [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au) > provides a comprehensive overview of avian flu and measures taken by the government to prepare for and reduce any threat.

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