

USDA calls on poultry owners to ‘defend flock’

Deadly viruses stalk chickens, turkeys

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The USDA has started a campaign to remind poultry farmers to safeguard their flocks from infectious and fatal diseases.

Bird flu and virulent Newcastle disease are particularly worrisome. Bird flu continues to surface in the U.S., though not with the ferocity of the 2015 calamity.

Virulent Newcastle disease, similarly contiguous and deadly, has been found 176 times since May in Southern California, almost entirely in what the USDA calls “backyard exhibition chickens.”

The USDA’s new initiative, dubbed “Defend the Flock,” resembles two earlier campaigns to promote biosecurity, but has been broadened to apply to commercial and backyard poultry.

Foreign countries do not take lightly infectious diseases in non-commercial flocks. The U.S. poultry industry was quickly prohibited from many countries in late 2014 when a small backyard flock in Southern Oregon came down with highly pathogenic bird flu.

“While each of the previous campaigns were successful, by combining them and emphasizing shared responsibility, USDA will improve its ability to promote biosecurity and protect avian health across the country,” USDA Chief Veterinary Officer Jack Shere said in a written statement.

Highly pathogenic bird flu claimed more than 50 million chickens and turkeys in the U.S. in 2015. The disease killed few, but contaminated flocks were euthanized. The USDA reported that revenue from U.S. poultry exports declined by \$1.3 billion from the year before.

The outbreak started in the Pacific Flyway, the migratory route over Washington, Oregon, Idaho and California. The virus appeared in late 2014 in commercial poultry farms in British Columbia and then in a wild duck in Washington and then that backyard flock in Southern Oregon.

From there, bird flu hit commercial poultry barns in California and the Midwest. The panzootic, the animal equivalent of a pandemic, erupted into what the USDA called the worst animal-health disaster in U.S. history.

Migratory waterfowl spread the disease in their feces, making poultry kept outdoors particularly exposed. The outbreak was so devastating, however, because the virus got into barns holding tens of thousands of birds.

The virus clings to clothes and equipment and can be spread from barn to barn by workers, according to a report prepared for lawmakers by the Congressional Research Service. The report, citing USDA findings, said the virus also may have been moved about by rodents and small birds, and even the wind.

Low pathogenic bird flu, less contagious but just as fatal to flocks, most recently appeared in the U.S. in October in commercial turkey barns about 60 miles apart in Minnesota.

Globally, highly pathogenic bird flu has appeared in 68 countries and killed nearly 122.6 million birds since 2013, according to the World Organization for Animal Health. New outbreaks continue to be reported in Asia and Europe.

Virulent Newcastle disease, formerly known as exotic Newcastle disease, affects the respiratory, nervous and digestive systems of poultry. “Virulent” is part of the disease’s name, and the word is apt, according to the USA. The disease strikes so quickly that many birds die without showing any signs of being sick.

USDA posts information online about safeguarding flocks at www.aphis.usda.gov/animalhealth/defendtheflock.

White resigns as Klamath Water Users Association director

Announcement comes after difficult year

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

Scott White, executive director of the Klamath Water Users Association in Klamath Falls, Ore., announced Monday he will resign from the job following a 2018 irrigation season plagued by drought and uncertainty.

White, 40, joined the KWUA in February 2016. The association represents 1,200 family farms and ranches within the Klamath Project, a federal water management project that encompasses over 170,000 acres in Southern Oregon and Northern California.

“I’ve been blessed to work for these guys the last three years,” White told the Capital Press. “It becomes who you are. It’s an identity that I’m extremely proud of, and it’s not easy to walk away from.”

White’s last day is Friday,



George Plaven/Capital Press File

Scott White announced Nov. 19 he will resign as executive director of the Klamath Water Users Association. His last day on the job is Friday, Nov. 30.

Nov. 30. KWUA President Brad Kirby said the board will act promptly to fill the position. Until then, KWUA attorney Paul Simmons will fill in as interim executive director.

Kirby, who also serves as manager of the Tulelake Irrigation District in Tulelake, Calif., said White was “the right person at the right time” to lead the association through a challenging period that included very dry condi-

tions, multiple lawsuits and a court injunction.

“We’re united and stronger than we were when Scott arrived,” Kirby said.

Ultimately, White said the stress took a toll on him and his family.

This year was especially nerve-racking, as growers had to wait until June before the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation issued its annual water allotment for the Klamath Project while balancing de-

mands for fish.

On April 30, a federal judge in San Francisco upheld a 2017 injunction that requires the bureau to send more water from Upper Klamath Lake downstream to flush away a deadly salmon-killing parasite, known as C. shasta, in the lower Klamath River.

At the same time, the Klamath Tribes also sued the Bureau of Reclamation, National Marine Fisheries Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service seeking to hold more water in Upper Klamath Lake to protect endangered shortnose and Lost River suckers. The same judge, William Orrick, denied their request for an injunction and transferred the case to U.S. District Court in Oregon.

Meanwhile, drought only compounded fears of water shortages heading into summer, set up by a below-average mountain snowpack. White said he felt like there was a crisis on his hands almost every single day.

“There is just this ache of

anxiety in your chest around the clock,” he said. “It hit me hard.”

But it wasn’t all bad news in 2018. As difficult as it was, White said they did make it through the season and came out the other side with up to \$10 million in emergency relief for future drought years — a provision written into the America’s Water and Infrastructure Act of 2018, which was signed by President Donald Trump on Oct. 23.

White said the new KWUA executive director will be responsible for ensuring those dollars are appropriated, possibly as early as next year given forecasts for a warmer and drier winter across the Pacific Northwest due to El Nino.

As for himself, White said he plans to take December off, taking time to decompress and recharge his batteries.

“These guys mean a lot to me, and I am sincerely hopeful there is a secure and prosperous future for all of them,” White said.

Federal report: Climate change imperils some farms, but there’s hope

More bugs, but more wheat, too

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Farmers and ranchers in the West will be pressed to adapt to minimize losses as temperatures rise by several degrees over the next few decades, according to the Fourth National Climate Assessment.

Average annual temperatures in the Northwest have increased nearly 2 degrees Fahrenheit since 1900. Temperatures are projected to rise 2.3 to 11 degrees by the late 21st century. The outcome depends on future greenhouse gas emissions, according to the federal study led by the National Oceanic and Atmo-

spheric Administration and released Friday.

The report catalogs the potential pitfalls of higher temperatures, such as less water and forage, more weeds and insects and overheated livestock.

The assessment, however, notes that farmers and nature adapt. Plants and livestock can be bred to withstand higher temperatures. Dryland wheat yields, for example, are expected to rise as growers shift planting dates and plants use water more efficiently.

“Risks associated with climate change depend on the rate and severity of the change and the ability of producers to adapt to changes,” according to the report’s summary on agriculture. “These adaptations include altering what is pro-

duced, modifying the inputs used for production, adopting new technologies, and adjusting management strategies.”

The report was the second half of a quadrennial national assessment on climate change. The first half was released last year and focused on how higher temperatures are affecting the earth. Volume II surveys the effects on human health, the economy and society.

The assessment warns the Northwest’s 2015 snowpack provided a preview of may become “more commonplace” and cites a study led by the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute at Oregon State University.

According to the study’s abstract, the low snowpack in Oregon and Washington that winter was more due to

unusually warm sea-surface temperatures than human influence.

The Palmer Drought Severity Index, a measure of temperatures and precipitation, shows “no detectable change in long-term U.S. drought statistics,” according to the assessment.

Still, the specter of drought hangs over the assessment. Irrigators who rely on surface water will be particularly vulnerable, according to the report.

As is the case now, farmers with junior water rights will be more affected than growers with senior water rights. A more “robust” market for buying and selling water rights may help agriculture adapt, the assessment states.

Northwest livestock pro-

ducers should fare better than ranchers in hotter regions. Still, production costs probably will rise because animals will need more water and have less forage, according to the report.

Dairy cows are particularly sensitive to higher temperatures because heat reduces their appetite. Dairies everywhere are expected to lose production. Losses in the Pacific Northwest are expected to be small compared to the Southeast and Southern Plains.

Sea levels are expected to rise and threaten coastal towns. At the high end, sea levels are projected to rise by as much as 8 feet by 2100. A “very likely range” is between 1 foot and 4 feet, according to the assessment. So far, the annual median sea level has risen 9 inches since the early 20th century.

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