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# January 2025 Newsletter

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## Avian Influenza: What we know, what we don't know, and why farmers should be concerned

*This update is based on a webinar from the Wisconsin Veterinary College, DATCP, and the WVMA.*

We know infected herds lose about \$191 per month per cow, or a 5,000-cow dairy loses about one million dollars a month. This should be a huge concern to every dairy farmer. In infected herds, about half the infected cows, or at least half the cows that get sick, end up being culled. In California this actually depressed cull cow prices. Recent reports are that there are increased abortions in infected herds and because the mammary gland is infected, milk somatic cell counts are a problem.

We don't know how the virus spreads from farm to farm. We don't know why it pops up in some states and not others. We know that infected cattle shed the virus in massive numbers in milk. We do have some assumptions about the spread. Humans can get the infection, and it looks like in several cases farm workers working on multiple farms spread it. Certainly, cattle moving from farm to farm spread it. Recently the virus has changed slightly as influenza viruses do, and it is causing calf pneumonia in California. Pasteurization kills the virus, but if raw milk is fed to calves it becomes a problem. In California it has spread rapidly between herds, but in Ohio, a single farm was infected, and the disease didn't spread.

We know the virus kills a wide variety of mammals, lions and tigers and cats can die. All kinds of wild animals get infected, bears, opossums, and foxes. Wild animal infections may be important after investigating a case in Texas. Texas thought the disease was eradicated, but a week ago it showed up on a farm that had it previously and was determined free. Was it still on the farm in cattle, in birds, or did it come from another farm that hasn't been reported? Recently a dairy goat farm had an outbreak.

We know the virus, H5N1, has damaged the poultry industry for the last two and a half years. Slaughtering

all infected chickens in infected flocks hasn't eliminated the disease. But it is my understanding that it is a different sub virus infecting poultry (D1.1 and D1.2) then the one infecting cattle (B3.13). That said, the poultry industry is driving the elimination of the virus in all livestock facilities.

USDA has some preliminary work being done with vaccine companies, and safety and efficacy studies are ongoing. The regulatory powers at this point would rather not accept a vaccine.

I'm guessing regulators feel a vaccine would lower the chance of eliminating the disease in the U.S. A vaccine lowers the changes of U.S. becoming disease free, less pressure to eradicate the disease. Although, if COVID or the poultry industry have taught us anything, viruses that mutate rapidly and don't create long term immunity, don't go away.

Interestingly, we know the virus shows up in bulk tanks about two weeks before the disease is apparent in cows. This might allow some reaction time. In infected states, milk in processor silos is being tested and traced back to infected herds is being initiated. If a farm has the virus, it will become known.

Positive farms are quarantined. No animal movement except to slaughter. In California an exception was made to allow heifer calves to go to a heifer grower, but that grower then couldn't move cattle off his operation.

Certainly, there are way more questions than answers, but the one thing that is for sure is that the economic cost to an individual farm is tremendous.

The dairy industry has long been terrible with biosecurity. Animals move from farm to farm and to fairs and exhibits, then back to the home farm. The first lesson is that every dairy farm should take a hard look at biosecurity. Biosecurity should be your New Year's resolution.

*"In infected herds, about half the infected cows, or at least half the cows that get sick, end up being culled,"*

- *Dr. Al Martins*

# Dr. Al Reminiscences of Years Ago ...

I graduated from high school in June of 1973. I started college that fall and started vet school in June of 1975. I had one summer off during college. It was the summer of 1974. It's interesting to look back at the price of food and life back in those days.

I spent the first two years living in a dorm. This had the advantage of good food that we all complained about and no housekeeping responsibilities, but I wanted out of the dorm so once I was in vet school I moved into an apartment. My mom controlled the purse strings, and she wouldn't allow me to get a student loan, she wouldn't fill out the forms. Mom grew up in the depression. Her family had meatless meals frequently, she knew firsthand what a lard sandwich was, and occasionally she would prepare cornmeal mush for our breakfast like she had growing up. Cornmeal mush was like cream of wheat, only it was made from cornmeal.

She would boil it for a while, then most people would put something like brown sugar on top to flavor it, but instead she would use sorghum syrup. Sorghum syrup is a molasses made from sorghum grain, and it tastes worse than it sounds. So does the mush. For dinner, her family would have the leftover mush, but they would spoon it out like pancake batter onto a frying pan and make cornmeal fried cake, in lard, and more sorghum syrup. Everyone is a product of their environment growing up.

That background is why I was given \$10 a week for food. I shopped exclusively at a Meyer's store, which was similar to a cheap Walmart. I had to turn in receipts to Mom. I'm serious. I ate peanut butter and grape jelly for three years for lunch. I ate generic cornflakes with milk and sugar for three years for breakfast.

My dinner menu will make you smile. I ate a high protein diet with a starch, and a vegetable. The starch was potatoes or rice, the vegetables were frozen packages of beans, peas, spinach, or corn. The meat rotated from beef heart, beef liver, chicken wings (they were really cheap in those days) chicken gizzards, and "high-pro" burger, which was a white, soy infused, ground beef (maybe) product that was about 69 cents a pound.

I supplemented those with venison and squirrels, and an antelope a neighbor shot. When I was a junior in vet school, some classmates and I butchered a 10-year-old Herford bull that was donated to the school because he couldn't mount anymore due to his arthritis. I had to add corn oil to a frying pan to cook that burger to make spaghetti. When I was a senior, I butchered a 100-pound pig with a broken leg that was also donated.

That first summer, my roommate and I bought a case of beer on our first shopping trip to Meyer's. I think it was called something like "Alp's Brae" brand. It was \$1.89 for the case of 24 bottles. Seriously. The deposit for the 24 bottles was \$2.40. It was so bad that at the end of the summer we dumped half the bottles down the drain to get our deposit back.

No complaints, I'm glad mom controlled the purse strings. She introduced me to some financial self-

control. Summers in high school and the summer between my first two years of college, I worked as an electrician.

That alone was an incredible education, but I was paid very well, and I worked a lot of 70-hour weeks, a lot of weekends. I even worked on college breaks. I spent money like crazy, and it was guns, women, and partying. I was dead broke when I

started vet school. I am not sure I was any different than most kids in their early 20's in the 70's.

To this day, I will not eat corn flakes. I will skip breakfast before I consume cornflakes. I won't even eat Christmas cookies my wife makes with cornflakes and marshmallows and green food coloring.

I first ate a peanut butter and grape jelly sandwich when my kid Ryan and I were fishing in Alaska, and he was in charge of food procurement while I got some last-minute fishing tackle. After 45 years, it wasn't bad.

When I was dating my wife, a really extravagant dinner date was at Ponderosa for the steak, not much different than the bull we butchered, but it was all you could eat. Not sure why she married me.

It was all good. It was a challenge to meet the \$10 allowance, and when I graduated mom gave me a bill for the excess spending. It was about \$200. I still stoop over and pick up pennies.

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- Dr. Al