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20 July 2006

NZ POULTRY MEAT INDUSTRY FREE OF “BIRD FLU”

The completion of a comprehensive testing programme for notifiable Avian Influenza has clearly demonstrated that the New Zealand Poultry meat industry is free of notifiable avian influenza, Poultry Industry Association executive director Michael Brooks said today.

The testing programme not only sought evidence of the presence of highly pathogenic notifiable avian influenza but also low pathogenic notifiable avian influenza by testing blood samples from thousands of poultry meat birds. The numbers tested were required to meet an internationally agreed level of statistical validity.

Low pathogenic avian influenza can be carried by birds with little or no impact on their health. The testing programme results proved freedom from both high and low pathogenic notifiable avian influenza.

“We were always confident that our strict on-farm biosecurity and internal industry surveillance would ensure the poultry meat industry would be free of the disease. Now we have irrefutable proof.”

Biosecurity New Zealand carried out the testing programme to meet new World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) reporting requirements and to demonstrate New Zealand’s commercial poultry meat freedom from notifiable avian influenza.

New Zealand is part of a global network for early warning and detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza.

“We have always maintained that the New Zealand poultry meat industry has a unique major poultry disease free status, unparalleled in the rest of the world. This result further re-inforces this belief, is a reflection of our commitment to biosecurity and is something the poultry meat industry can be justifiably proud of.”

There are many strains of avian influenza viruses, which are naturally present in many species of healthy wild birds, especially water fowl. Most strains of avian influenza virus do not cause disease in birds and are not of human health concern.

Key Facts

- Under the Biosecurity Act (1993) the importation of live birds, fresh and frozen poultry and other bird products that could carry disease and bacteria that could pose a risk to New Zealand poultry and native birds is prohibited.
- New Zealand has never had an outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (like H5N1), or Exotic Newcastle Disease. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza and Exotic Newcastle Disease have been reported in many countries, including the United States, and controlling outbreaks costs millions of dollars.
- New Zealanders ate 37.1 kilograms of chicken in 2005 per person, compared with 15 kilograms 15 years ago.
- Chicken is the meat most consumed by New Zealanders. In the year ended December 2004, poultry meat expenditure totalled \$524 million – representing 38.9% of the combined sheepmeat, beef, poultry and pigmeat consumption and 26.1% of retail meat expenditure.

For comment
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