

Protect Agricultural Health by Minimizing Major Diseases and Pests to Ensure Access to Safe, Plentiful, and Nutritious Food

ACHIEVEMENTS: In FY 2015, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) addressed a variety of pests and diseases and worked to develop ways to mitigate the damages caused by significant threats to U.S. agricultural production. For example, APHIS took the lead in responding to the outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), the largest animal health emergency in U.S. history. HPAI findings occurred in commercial premises, backyard flocks, captive wild birds and/or wild birds, with 21 states affected and close to 50 million commercial birds depopulated to control the disease. The APHIS response team worked diligently to contain and eradicate the disease, safely dispose of infected materials and ensure the virus was eliminated at affected farms so they could safely return to production. APHIS' actions were essential to maintaining the vitality of the country's poultry industry, especially the turkey and egg layer segments who were hit hard in this outbreak. Additionally, industry is working jointly with APHIS and State animal health officials to enhance biosecurity practices to better protect against HPAI viruses in the future.

Early pest detection is important to avert economic and environmental damage because once a pest becomes established or significantly spreads, the mitigation costs can reach millions of dollars, in addition to lost farm revenues and damage to ecosystems. In monitoring for potentially serious animal diseases, APHIS typically conducts more than 500,000 diagnostic tests per year on approximately 250,000 animal samples collected. In FY 2015, however, the Agency conducted more than 700,000 diagnostic tests on approximately 500,000 animal samples collected. APHIS also conducts early detection plant pest and disease surveys—targeting various fruit, vegetable, and honey bee pests—in cooperation with all 50 States, 3 Territories, Tribal and local governments, industry partners, and other stakeholders.

CHALLENGES: USDA must continually prioritize the list of major pest and disease threats. These threats are increasing both domestically and internationally. The Department's surveillance efforts will need to be adjusted to respond to these threats.