Industry gears up in case avian flu returns

By KRISSSA WELSHANS

SINCE the first reported U.S. case of highly pathogenic avian influenza in December 2014, more than 49 million chickens and turkeys have died or were euthanized across 15 states.

The disease also led to 75 countries issuing either a full or partial ban on U.S. poultry exports, which resulted in nearly $390 million in lost export revenue in the first quarter. The steep decline in exports was one of the largest ever seen.

“Even one infected chicken house could have a global impact,” said Mark Leggett, president of the Mississippi Poultry Assn. “One of the worst impacts from the avian flu in the U.S. is the impact on global trade. We export a large percentage of poultry products to other countries around the world. Once these countries heard that avian influenza had reached America, some stopped importing U.S. chicken.”

Now, trading partners are reluctant to import any poultry products from the U.S., Leggett added.

“Fortunately, the strain of avian influenza detected in this country doesn’t affect humans, nor is it present on processed poultry products, and to date, there have been no commercial broiler flocks affected in the U.S.,” he said.

In fact, Leggett said all poultry flocks in the U.S. are tested prior to processing to make sure they are healthy and free of any virus.

However, the challenge is not over. “As fall brings cooler weather — the ideal climate for virus survival — state and federal agencies, industry representatives and wildlife experts are all working to mitigate the ramifications of another outbreak like the one seen earlier this spring. These measures include ramping up biosecurity practices at all facilities across the country.”

“There is a lot of preparation and coordination happening at every level,” said Dr. Phil Stayer, corporate veterinarian for Sanderson Farms, the country’s third-largest poultry producer.

An initial report of the virus will set in motion a cascade of events that is already scripted out from the state and federal plans, including quarantines, depopulation and limits on movement, Stayer explained.

Since 2014, Sanderson Farms has also been sending frequent communications to its employees and growers to remind them of the risk of avian influenza and to stress the importance of strict adherence to the company’s biosecurity measures, Stayer noted.

“Previously, we thought the virus was primarily spread by coming up the driveway — transmitted from farm to farm by service vehicles and on equipment. Now, we realize it’s spread as waterfowl fly overhead, meaning it can easily be picked up by simply walking in your yard through duck droppings,” Stayer said. “This means we have had to change our entire mindset from just farm by farm to one that is (poultry) house by house, all of which means much tighter security.”

Experts around the country are paying particularly close attention to migrating waterfowl because those two countries constitute a target list for retaliation for more than $713 million (Canadian) per year of U.S. exports. Mexico requested authorization for more than $3.1 billion (Canadian) per year of U.S. exports.

“Fortunately, the strain of avian flu affects all bird species who contract the virus, and most birds that get it will get sick and die. However, waterfowl like geese and ducks don’t necessarily get sick and can carry the virus for longer periods of time and from place to place as they migrate,” said Dr. Kenneth Angel with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Veterinary Services branch for Louisiana and Mississippi.

“We know that waterfowl are the main carriers of the virus, so that is where we are concentrating our efforts. We also know the virus does not survive well in warm temperatures, which may account for why we didn’t see large outbreaks during the spring months in the southern portion of the U.S.,” Angel said. “However, now that the temperatures are dropping and the birds are beginning to leave their nesting grounds in the North and Midwest, we see the greatest potential for impact in the November/December time frame.”

Dairy industry urges prompt COOL action

By JACQUI FATKA

THE dairy industry said it is “critical” that Congress solve the trade dispute over country-of-origin labeling (COOL) to head off damaging new tariffs Canada and Mexico may impose on U.S. dairy exports.

In a letter to the Senate, the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), U.S. Dairy Export Council (USDEC) and International Dairy Foods Assn. (IDFA) expressed “growing apprehension” that retaliatory tariffs are drawing closer after parts of the U.S. COOL rule were found to violate World Trade Organization rules.

The final report from a WTO arbitration panel on COOL retaliation originally was expected to be released on Nov. 27, but that date has now been pushed back as the report can be translated into multiple languages — a normal step in the process. The arbitration panel is expected to announce a new release date shortly.

The dairy groups are urging the Senate “to pass legislation to bring the U.S. into compliance with its WTO obligations without further delay.”

Last spring, WTO ruled against the U.S. COOL program and said Canada and Mexico could retaliate against U.S. exports in response. American dairy products have been on Canada’s target list for retaliatory tariffs resulting from the ruling.

Retaliation against dairy products would come at a particularly challenging time for our industry, given the currently depressed global dairy market,” NMPF, USDEC and IDFA said. “Multiple cooperatives have already been faced, at times this year, with oversupply of milk, causing them to dispose of excess milk at a loss. Retaliatory tariffs would back up exports further onto the U.S. market during this time of overly abundant milk supplies.”

The groups added that any congressional solution must satisfy Canada and Mexico because those two countries would retain their right to retaliate against the U.S. until a lengthy WTO arbitration process concludes. “U.S. dairy producers and processors cannot risk getting mired down in that drawn-out process,” they said.

Over the summer, the House passed a bill to fully repeal COOL, which had widespread support. While Senate Agriculture Committee chairman Pat Roberts (R., Kan.) also supports a full repeal, ranking member Debbie Stabenow (D., Mich.) and Sen. John Hoeven (R., N.D.) have introduced a bill that would make COOL voluntary.

Canada and Mexico said they will accept nothing less than a full repeal of COOL to avoid imposing tariffs on U.S. products. The three dairy groups asked the Senate to work together “to put in place an outcome that Canada and Mexico agree resolves this issue.”

Canada has requested authorization to impose tariffs on more than $3.1 billion (Canadian) per year of U.S. exports. Mexico requested authorization for more than $713 million in retaliatory tariffs. The U.S. has estimated the costs related to COOL arbitration at $91 million.

MITIGATING EFFECTS: Government agencies, the industry and wildlife experts are working to mitigate the ramifications of a potential return of avian influenza this fall.

Ceva enters swine sector

From page 1

Swine business

One aspect of reaching the goal to be in the top five is Ceva’s growth within the swine industry, according to Wallace.

He said in order for Ceva to be in the top five globally, it must be successful in the swine markets — “not just in the U.S. but globally. Clearly, for us, this is a segment where we are expecting to have a great deal of success.”

Wallace said Ceva will provide resources or consultations to help producers be successful, even if it means using another company’s product.

In most instances, he said its innovation will mean that Ceva probably has a product appropriate for the situation. However, if not, “there are going to be times where we still are partnering with that producer in a way to help them be successful,” he added.

Ceva director of the swine business unit Gary Robertson said the swine portfolio will also include breeding and reproduction solutions, in addition to animal health products.

“Everyone is focused on circovirus in grow/finish pigs. There is a whole other part of the business that’s not getting any attention. We are building a portfolio to support breeding and reproduction,” Robertson said, adding that this branch will remain separate from the biologics branch of the company’s swine division.

“Much like our customers, we have a breed-to-weigh focus in our portfolio and a wean-to-finish focus. We are building products and solutions that fit within those categories,” Robertson said.

Ceva Swine is currently developing products to launch in early 2016. Additionally, Ceva is in the process of building a $30 million, 35,000 sq. ft. facility committed to the swine sector.