

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Two cases of HPAI on duck farms in France threatening the foie gras industry

Country: France

Post: Paris

Report Category: Agriculture in the News, Pest/Disease Occurrences, Poultry and Products

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Report Highlights:

The French Government announced this week that ducks on two farms in southwestern France were infected with Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). All birds on both farms were culled. Experts believe that the H5N8 virus is likely found throughout France in wild geese, ducks and swans. The new outbreak is a threat to the French foie gras sector, already suffering from the COVID-19 lockdown and closure of restaurants. The 2017 HPAI outbreak cost the sector \$300 million.

The Ministry of Agriculture confirmed this week that ducks on two farms in Southwestern France were infected with the H5N8 avian flu virus. Both farms in the Landes region were depopulated by December 8. France also confirmed that a wild goose in western France and three wild swans in eastern France were found dead from the same strain in HPAI, indicating that the virus is likely to be more widespread than previously thought.

The HPAI finding is worrying for the French foie gras sector. France is the largest foie gras producer in the world, with about 74 percent of the global production in 2019. France produced 16,800 MT of foie gras in 2019, slaughtering about 33 million fattened ducks. About 4,000 MT of foie gras with a value of approximately \$125 million is exported from France annually. There are approximately 4,000 farms producing foie gras in France, either as their primary or secondary source of farm income.

Traditionally before the two-week indoor forced feeding period, ducklings and ducks are raised outdoors on free-range farms. Thus, the risk of a contamination from wildfowl is high, especially because many migrating birds travel over the production region in southwest France to Spain and Africa.

The 2016-2017 HPAI outbreak in led to a sharp decline in foie gras production in France, in 2017 average production was down 32 percent. To eradicate the outbreak at that time, France ordered the culling of four million duck and geese. While the producers received some compensation from the Ministry of Agriculture, the foie gras sector estimates that the 2016/2017 outbreak cost producers and processors \$300 million.

Facing reduced demand in 2020 because of the COVID-19 lockdown and the current closure of restaurants until at least mid-January 2021, the French foie gras industry is already in crisis. Producers now fear that the outbreak will lead to more culling. There are also concerns that consumers will hesitate to purchase the product out of fear of contracting the virus, although HPAI it is not transmissible to humans through consumption.

Attachments:

No Attachments.