U.S. DAIRY EXPORT COUNCIL

DATE: April 3, 2024

USDEC Members,

Monday, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued two important updates on the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) (H5N1) virus in dairy cattle as well as one person. Please see below.

From an export perspective, there are no known export disruptions or barriers to U.S. dairy trade and exports at this time. Again, our industry is working with federal partners including USDA to ensure trading partners rely on the OIE-acknowledged, science-based food safety steps taken in U.S. dairy processing to prevent any unnecessary and unfair barriers to trade.

Below are specific updates on the situation as of Tuesday:

1. **CDC confirms HPAI H5N1 virus infection reported in a person in the U.S.** – The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that a person in the U.S. has tested positive for the highly pathogenic avian influenza HPAI H5N1 virus, as reported by the Texas Department of Health and Human Services. According to the CDC, the person had exposure to dairy cattle in Texas presumed to be infected with HPAI. The patient reported eye redness (consistent with conjunctivitis), as their only symptom, and is recovering. The patient was told to isolate and is being treated with an antiviral drug for flu.

CDC and Texas DSHS stated Tuesday that avian influenza (H5N1) viruses have only rarely been transmitted from person to person. As such, the risk to the general public remains low at this time. However, people with close or prolonged, unprotected exposures to infected birds or other animals (including livestock), or to environments contaminated by infected birds or other animals, are at greater risk of infection. USDA, FDA, CDC and state public and animal health agencies have issued guidance to dairy farmers underscoring the need for advanced biosecurity protocols to protect human and animal health and secure our nation's food supply.

2. Pasteurized milk and dairy remain safe – consumers should avoid raw milk – The USDA, CDC, FDA, and state of Texas affirmed again Tuesday that pasteurized milk and dairy products remain safe to consume. U.S. dairy products are pasteurized before entering the marketplace. Pasteurization is proven to inactivate bacteria and viruses, like influenza inclusive of avian influenza, in milk. Routine testing and well-established protocols for U.S. dairy also continue to ensure that only safe milk enters the food supply. The federal Grade "A" Pasteurized Milk Ordinance (PMO) prohibits milk from sick cows from entering the food supply chain. Sick or affected dairy cows are segregated on farms, as is normal practice with any animal health concern, and their milk does not enter the food supply. Pasteurization is required for any milk entering interstate commerce for human consumption.

Additionally, USDA and FDA remind consumers that raw milk should not be consumed regardless of its availability. Raw milk is a key vehicle in the transmission of human pathogens, including E. coli O157:H7, Campylobacter, Listeria monocytogenes, and Salmonella, among others. As this situation continues to evolve, USDA and FDA strongly recommend that all raw milk and raw milk components be heat treated to a temperature and duration that kills harmful pathogenic bacteria and other microorganisms, including viruses inclusive of HPAI, regardless of the product's intended use for human or animal consumption. FDA also recommends out of an abundance of caution that milk from cows in an affected herd not be used to produce raw milk cheeses.

3. USDA confirms HPAI in dairy herd in New Mexico, as well as 5 additional dairy herds in Texas – USDA also confirmed the detection of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in a dairy herd in New Mexico, as well as 5 additional dairy herds in Texas. APHIS shared on March 29 that its National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) in Ames, Iowa, was working to confirm presumptive positive test results from New Mexico, Texas and Idaho herds; this announcement is a follow up to that information.

Federal and state agencies continue to conduct additional testing in swabs from sick animals and in unpasteurized clinical milk samples from sick animals, as well as viral genome sequencing, to assess whether HPAI or another unrelated disease may be underlying any symptoms. The NVSL has also confirmed that the strain of the virus found in subsequent states is very similar to the strain originally confirmed in cattle in Texas and Kansas that appears to have been introduced by wild birds (H5N1, Eurasian lineage goose/Guangdong clade 2.3.4.4b).

- Advanced biosecurity remains paramount – robust biosecurity protocols are critical to preventing and managing HPAI on dairy farms. HPAI is primarily spread by birds to animals, including mammals, and will spread on farms by people carrying matter from infected birds—such as dust, dander, and bird droppings—on their clothing, gloves, soles of their shoes, vehicle tires, animal trailers, and other equipment, in addition to contaminated water. As we learn more about vectors of transmission, guidance and resources may be expanded.
- Reporting is key – If farmers suspect their cows are sick, veterinarians should report illnesses to state vet authorities as soon as possible. USDA has told the dairy community and practitioners that cattle are expected to fully recover in a few weeks and there is no need to cull dairy cows as HPAI poses a low risk to human health. In the meantime, USDA strongly recommends limited or cautious movement of cattle, testing before moving cattle, and quarantining cattle upon arrival at their destination. USDA will continue to share information as they learn more.
- CDC recommends prevention measures for farm workers – CDC outlines recommendations for preventing exposures HPAI H5N1.

Please send questions or comments to jbrown@usdec.org.

Jerry Brown
USDEC Senior Vice President of Communications

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