

USDA to Change Rules on Avian Influenza Indemnity; Banks to Work with Growers

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As everyone in the poultry industry in Mississippi makes preparations for the possible outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) this fall, there are some changes that growers will see and some that they won't.

One change is that the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced Sept. 18 was that growers will share in the compensation for the birds lost that has gone to the owner of the birds in an HPAI outbreak. The Department will publish an interim rule to set out a split of indemnity payments between owner and grower.

In the case of low path AI, growers and owners of the birds in the past have split the indemnity payments, but that was not the case for HPAI. The HPAI payments will be based on fair market value.

Another change, growers will see is a biosecurity auditing system that will confirm that growers are following the individual biosecurity plan for their farms focusing on "minimizing the risk of spread between poultry operations and between individual houses on the same operation."

USDA is "publishing an interim rule on HPAI indemnity that will contain a provision requiring all future "HPAI-affected commercial poultry producers to self-certify that biosecurity procedures were in place at the time HPAI was detected," the Sept. 18 HPAI Preparedness Plan states.

One thing that will not change is your bankers' interest in your

success. MPA checked with several of the state's largest lending institutions to find out what their response to HPAI would be.

"We want the growers who have loans from BankPlus to know that we will work with them to get through this should there be an outbreak affecting their farm," said First Vice President Kenny Williamson.

First Financial Bank Vice President Michael Barnes said FFB had worked with growers on their loans when they were sidelined by hurricanes and tornadoes and would take the same approach with HPAI.

"Community Bank has partnered with poultry farmers for years and their financial success is an important part of our bank's success. We will work with our growers," said Senior Vice President Jay Swindle.

"Peoples Bank has a long history of working with our poultry growers and that will not change. If an outbreak were to occur, we would be right there with our growers working with them in every way possible," said Senior Vice President Chris Caughman.

"For nearly 100 years, Southern AgCredit has been there for our customer owners during good times and bad. That commitment remains a cornerstone of our cooperative structure," said Southern Ag Credit CEO Joe Hayman.

Hopefully, HPAI will bypass Mississippi this fall, but if it doesn't it will require everyone working together and that cooperation of integrators, growers, state and federal agencies, lending institutions, universities and others has already begun.