



Hey folks, welcome to this week's episode of AgriCast Digest! I have some recent news for you as well as some Q&A. We're also working on an awesome line up of people to interview this summer about a variety of subjects and we hope to have a tentative schedule up for y'all pretty soon.

Now, I'm not sure how many of you have been following the Avian Flu outbreak this year. The USDA estimates that about 40 million poultry have either died or been culled because of it. If you didn't know before, it's often spread by wild birds making contact with domesticated birds, which is why it tends to show up more when the geese and ducks are migrating.

However, the USDA has noticed that backyard chicken farmers have not been highly impacted! This is the opposite of what they assumed since backyard chickens usually have more access to the open and thus more access to wild birds who spread the virus. But despite the crazy sanitation and safety precautions the big battery farms are taking such as disinfecting delivery trucks and wearing everything but a biohazard suit, commercial poultry continues to die in near record numbers while backyard chickens are hardly touched.

Of 181 outbreaks so far reported, the USDA says that only 18 of those are non-commercial farms. Why is that, do you think?

I don't want to gross anyone out here, but have any of you ever seen what happens to chickens in those big commercial farms? Beakless, cramped, and forced to lay until they're of no more use and then they die. The living conditions are disgusting and heart breaking.

So the USDA is discovering what any vet could tell you: a healthy animal has more natural resistance to viruses than an unhealthy animal.

This is why it's so important to treat your animals respectfully, folks. Bird flu can spread to humans. It happens. This whole thing is a matter of reaping what you sow. You CAN have commercial farms where chickens are not treated like this. It's possible to do it. Does it cost a little more? Maybe, maybe not. Is it worth doing? Absolutely!

Do I sound like I'm really trying to push this home to people? Yes. Do I sound as crazy as the 'her name is Snow', lady? Lord I hope not!

Have any of y'all heard of her before? I'm going to play the clip. You've got to hear this!

(play clip of 'her name is snow')

Okay, okay. I shouldn't make fun of the mentally ill. When I heard it on the radio I had missed the DJ talking about it and I thought she was talking about her child. Apparently the whole segment they did started because a recent Gallup poll said that 1/3 of Americans want human rights for animals.



I really wish folks could play somewhere in the middle without these crazy extremes.

Before I get on another tangent about that, please let me advise you that you should probably take this bird flu epidemic seriously. I don't mean batten down the hatches, but you should practice some basic safety tips that are good to practice anyway.

- get your birds from farms that have a certified clean bill of health and ask the county extension office for a list of recommendations where you live*
- if you go to another farm at least change your clothes and shoes before going out to tend to your own flock*
- the standard suggestion is always to give your birds well water instead of pond water since pond water is open to infected wild birds*
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The summer weather should kill most of this off, but keep these suggestions in mind when the weather starts to cool and migratory birds come back.

Now we'll get down to our Q&A for the week.

We had a question recently from our good ol' buddy Ken Lang. He writes: We have had an abundance of rain in the last couple of months. The gnats and flies are getting to be a problem. Mostly the gnats (white miniature flies). What do you suggest? My birds are going crazy!!!

Ken, I sympathize with you, my friend! This will be a big problem, especially if they get up in the nostrils and bother the hens. It can smother them in extreme cases.

I'd get a huge bottle of that cheap imitation Mexican vanilla, mix it with equal parts water, and hose your coop and chickens down. This will help repel flies and gnats. You can also set out shallow dishes full of the following solution in places where your chickens can't get to it to drown some of the bugs:

- water*
- dish soap*
- vinegar*

Mix that up and pour it into the shallow dishes. Then pour a cone of sugar into it so it sticks up above the water line. It'll draw them in and kill them. Works inside the house, too. Every summer we get those fruit flies and gnats and fat black flies and it kills them all, inside and out. I hope this helps!

Next is Suzanne, she writes: I thought I read somewhere about how the perch should be higher from the floor than the nesting box and how much higher. Plus how wide the perch should be so it is comfortable for the chooks to hold onto and how high off the floor so that they don't



have to jump too high. So I was wondering if you had information about these things to help me please?

Also, we have 4 chooks now but I was thinking of building a coop big enough for up to 8 chooks, but then I read the coop size should be still small enough for the chooks to stay warm in winter. We don't have very cold winters (say about 40F to 48F minimum overnight) but if i do build a bigger coop,while there are still only 4 chooks, would it be a good idea to make an extra 'enclosure' around the perch inside the coop for them to keep warm?

Cheers

Suzanne

There's a few questions in there so let me take them one at a time. If you have 4 chickens then they probably have a pretty defined pecking order. When chickens perch, your head honcho will take the highest perch automatically and leave the lower bars to other hens who are further down the totem pole.

I would stagger several heights (like stairs) so they can pick what they like best. Nice sturdy branches or sanded lumber are the best materials to use. You can start about 10" inches above the roost and go as high as you'd like. It'll certainly make things easier later if you do expand to more hens as you intend to do.

For roost width, I suggest 3-4 inches so they can sleep completely flat footed.

As far as the extra enclosure to keep them warm goes, I wouldn't bother. Just make sure your coop is airtight and dry (from external elements) and you'll be all right in a mild winter like that.

Sue asks about her friend's goat. The poor thing's hair is falling out and his skin is itchy and flaky. The vet checked for mites and they gave him Frontline. Still happening. They're giving him flax seed oil and sunflower seeds internally and rubbing him down with flax oil but apparently nothing's doing.

Hi Sue, thanks for writing in about this. There is a saying in the natural health community that internal problems are often externally manifested. So when we have an issue with our bowels, for example, it'll often show up on our skin. Dysbiosis is one human complaint I know of that frequently has dry, itchy, flaky skin as a side effect because of fungal takeover.

The vet seems to be checking for external problems when I think the problem is inside. Look at what the goat is eating other than those oil giving seeds. Is the goat eating a lot of starchy or sugary foods? Just like vent gleet in hens can be caused by diet, this sounds like the same thing for your friend's goat since I'm assuming the vet would have ruled out ring worm with mites during the external exam.



Mineral deficiencies can also cause problems with goats, so ask your vet or local farm supply store for a good mineral supplement for goats.

*Our last question today comes from Jim Toolis. **Jim wants to know how to introduce new pullets into a flock without pecking and fighting.***

Hey there Jim! Unfortunately I have to tell you that this just isn't going to happen the way you'd like. They're going to peck, they're going to fight, and you're going to hate it. There are things you can do to help ease the transition, though.

- boredom prevention devices like cabbages and tennis balls on a string will cure a lot of ills*
- throwing treats a little more often than normal during that transition week will help*
- quarantining the newbies NEAR the old chickens, where they can smell and see her will help a lot!*
- slip the new birds into the coop at night while they're all sleeping, which can also help sometimes*

Just make sure that the birds you are introducing are old enough to fight back! We lost 4 or 5 little ones that way because we thought the mother hen would protect them better so I speak from experience when I say to ensure they are at least 6-8 weeks old!

That's all for today, folks. So good night and God bless!