

Statement of Ranking Member Thomas R. Carper
“Stopping an Avian Influenza Threat to Animal and Public Health”
July 8, 2015

As prepared for delivery:

I would like to thank the Chairman and his staff for working with my staff and me on this important and timely hearing on avian influenza. It is my hope that we will all come away from this hearing more confident than ever in the strength and importance of America’s poultry industry and better prepared to respond to any further outbreaks should they occur.

The poultry industry is an integral part of our national economy. It supports over a million jobs nationwide and almost \$350 billion in total economic activity. Some of this industry is tied to egg production, which several of our colleagues know very well. Other parts of the industry, as in my home state of Delaware and on the Delmarva Peninsula, focus on the kind of chicken we eat, known as ‘broilers.’

As some of you may know, the Delmarva Peninsula – which includes parts of Delaware, Maryland and Virginia – is home to some of the largest broiler chicken producers in the U.S. In fact, Sussex County, Delaware, is considered the birthplace of the broiler chicken industry and produces more chickens than any other county in the United States. The total economic value that this industry brought to Delaware in 2014 was \$2.7 billion dollars. In fact, the meat from our broilers was exported all to nations around the world to tune of nearly \$140 million last year.

Some parts of the poultry industry, particularly in the Midwest, continue to grapple with the devastating impacts of the recent outbreak of avian influenza. We have lost millions of chickens and turkeys to this disease, and the economic losses are staggering.

If that’s not bad enough, some of our biggest trading partners have temporarily closed their doors to our poultry exports. In some instances, these bans affect every state that produces poultry products – not just those that have had a confirmed case of the flu.

Thankfully, there is some good news. The frequency of new cases has slowed significantly in recent weeks. Broiler chickens have yet to contract the virus. And as of now, there is no evidence of a threat to human health. We have farmers all across America to thank for much of this fortunate news. Their efforts – and sacrifices – have really made a difference. I’d also like to recognize our federal and state agriculture and public health officials for their hard work. Our friends in academia and industry have also done a great job.

But this is not a time to rest on our laurels. The possibility of a new outbreak, even here along the East coast, is very real. All of us need to remain on high alert. This is especially true as we move into migratory season in the coming months.

Today’s hearing provides an important opportunity to better understand the threats posed by avian flu. It will also help us examine the steps so many people are taking to not only put an end to this outbreak, but to ensure new cases don’t spring up elsewhere. We should also use this

hearing to identify lessons learned from our response, as well as any best practices that can make a difference in stopping future outbreaks.

I am especially interested in hearing from Professor Gelb about measures we've taken in Delaware and on Delmarva that could be applied nationwide to further contain the spread of virus.

At the end of the day, we all need to work together to stop the spread of avian flu. We must all continue to act with a sense of urgency to assure Americans, along with people all over the world, that our eggs, as well as the meat from our chickens and our turkeys, are safe to eat.

The current outbreak is a serious matter – there is no doubt about that. But we have experts around the country, like those with us today, that have dealt with these issues before and are laser focused on stopping the spread of this disease. With continued hard work, coordination and determination, we can – and will – solve this problem together.

With that, I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being with us today and I look forward to your testimony.

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