

VENEZUELA'S BAN ON IMPORTED POULTRY
AND POULTRY PRODUCTS

Submission by the United States for the Meeting on 1-2 July 1997

Introduction

1. In 1993, Venezuela published a resolution prohibiting the importation of US poultry and poultry products, purportedly because routine surveillance in 1992-93 detected exposure to avian influenza (AI) in some limited backyard flocks and markets in the northeastern United States. In 1997, this resolution was amended to prohibit these importations from any country reporting AI.
2. US poultry is safe. Since Venezuela's ban was implemented in 1993, the United States has exported millions of pounds of poultry meat and millions of hatching eggs and day-old chicks worldwide without incident. Poultry meat is not known to be a pathway for transmitting AI.
3. It is noteworthy that Argentina, Peru and Colombia lifted their AI restrictions (imposed in 1992-93) after assessing the health risk in the United States in light of site visits and scientific information provided by the US government and US poultry producers.

Available Scientific Evidence/Relevant International Standards

4. Venezuela continues to disregard scientific evidence and data which demonstrates that the United States is free of pathogenic AI. In the spring of 1993, the US government invited Venezuelan animal health officials to conduct site visits to assess the status of AI in the mid-Atlantic States. Federal and State officials, as well as diagnosticians, pointed out to veterinary officials from Venezuela that AI occurs worldwide, and explained the differences between non-pathogenic strains and highly pathogenic strains of the virus.
5. Venezuela's ban on US poultry for the ostensible purpose of guarding against AI is inconsistent with the Office international des épizooties (OIE) Code which addresses highly pathogenic strains of AI (i.e., Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza - HPAI). The OIE, as does most of the world, distinguishes between the non-pathogenic strains of AI and the pathogenic strains. Non-pathogenic strains of AI are not considered by the OIE to be an exotic disease which presents significant health risks to national poultry flocks and therefore warrant veterinary controls. The United States does not have HPAI as defined by the OIE.
6. The 1992-93 AI detections in the northeastern United States, which gave rise to Venezuela's ban, were non-pathogenic strains. According to the OIE, "virus of a pathogenicity sufficient to be designated fowl plague will cause at least 75 per cent mortality" (OIE Code, Chapter 2.1.14. Definition and OIE Manual of Standards, Chapter 14). Isolated virus from the 1992 detections (isolated in backyard

and live-bird markets in certain states) did not cause illness when it was inoculated into susceptible chickens. The US Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) testing was done in accordance with the relevant OIE diagnostic standards (Chapter 14 of the OIE Manual of Standards for Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines). These inoculations did not result in mortality and were performed in accordance with OIE testing standards.

7. APHIS, in cooperation with state authorities, conducts surveillance for AI. Surveillance is an essential element for any country with a good veterinary infrastructure. Our active surveillance demonstrates that US poultry exports are free of pathogenic AI.

8. The United States believes that AI is present in Venezuela because Venezuela is within a known migration path for migrating waterfowl. Waterfowl and other migratory birds are well known reservoirs for avian influenza. We are unaware of any national surveillance programme in place in Venezuela to detect and monitor AI in its poultry flocks.

Preliminary Assessment in Light of WTO Obligations

9. As shown above, Venezuela's measure fails to take into account relevant OIE standards, particularly OIE guidelines related to highly pathogenic AI. Furthermore, Venezuela has not provided or published the scientific risk assessment which would support its current import ban. Poultry meat is not known to be a means for transmitting AI. The United States has facilitated access by Venezuelan officials to poultry producing areas in the United States to verify poultry health conditions and quarantine practices, as well as provided relevant scientific information to Venezuelan veterinary authorities. Venezuela maintains a ban on US poultry despite the evidence demonstrating the safety of US poultry exports.

10. Venezuela's continued ban on imported US poultry products raises a number of serious concerns with respect to WTO requirements, including those set out in the SPS Agreement. We urge the Government of Venezuela to bring this measure into conformity with international obligations as soon as possible.