

CHILE: FREE OF AVIAN INFLUENZA

Communication by Chile

1. In May 2002, the presence of the Avian Influenza (AI) virus was detected in a flock of commercial poultry in Chile. The disease had never previously been detected in Chile or South America.
2. The outbreak in question affected a flock of meat-producing breeding hens in the Province of San Antonio, in Chile's Fifth Region. The emergency response plan of the official veterinary service (Agriculture and Livestock Service - SAG) for OIE List A diseases was activated.
3. Quarantine measures were adopted at the point of outbreak and all of the 460,000 birds in the flock were slaughtered. There was a second outbreak in a flock of breeding turkeys owned by the same company, located 4 kilometres away. The flock was quarantined and both groups of affected birds were slaughtered (18,000 birds). The remainder of the flock was subjected to strict biosecurity measures and active epidemiological surveillance. After the depopulation, a process of cleaning and sanitizing was initiated and sentinel birds were introduced in both flocks.
4. The virus involved was identified as highly pathogenic H7N3, which apparently resulted from the mutation of a low-pathogenic strain.
5. A perifocal zone 10 kilometres in radius was established around the two single points of outbreak. In this zone, there were 17 flocks of commercial poultry (meat and eggs) and 35 flocks of backyard poultry. Biosecurity and movement control measures were maximized, and active surveillance took place at 7 to 15 day intervals, depending on the risk.
6. Biosecurity measures in the poultry industry were also stepped up in the rest of the country, with passive and active surveillance of commercial flocks. In August and subsequently in November 2002, serological samples were taken at the national level from all flocks of commercial poultry (578) and backyard poultry that were at risk. Neither study revealed any cases of seropositivity to AI.
7. An OIE Mission, comprising specialists from the Venice Reference Centre (Italy) was called in by the SAG to inspect the eradication campaign and provide advice. It approved of the strategy adopted by Chile and all of the observations were accepted.
8. It has not yet been fully determined how AI was introduced into Chile. The investigation is still under way.
9. The epidemiological surveillance process revealed that a group of meat-producing flocks, owned by a company different to the one affected by the outbreaks, tested serologically positive for AI type H5N2, without any clinical manifestation or viral isolation. Epidemiological investigations

and findings of the SAG laboratory, using RT-PCR and sero-conversion in chicks, linked this to the use of an imported Inclusion Body Hepatitis vaccine that was contaminated with AI antigens. These results were confirmed by reference laboratories in the United States and the United Kingdom.

10. The process of disinfecting the outbreak points in the eradication zone and using susceptible chicks and baby turkeys as sentinel birds provided evidence of the absence of infection in the outbreak zone. Similarly, the active surveillance in the perifocal zone and in the rest of the country provided no evidence of the presence of the disease.

11. On 19 December 2002, in accordance with the OIE Animal Health Code, Chile declared the entire country free of AI once again. Thus, Chile is once again free of all OIE List A diseases.

12. Since then, a post-eradication AI prevention strategy has been implemented, including, in particular, measures such as import requirements for poultry and poultry products, import quarantine, compulsory registration of poultry flocks, movement control, active and passive surveillance and biosecurity in flocks.

13. Through its competent health authority (SAG), Chile offers foreign markets full guarantees on its poultry products. These have been accepted by all traditional poultry-importing countries with the exception of a few which are currently considering the matter.

14. It is noteworthy that, from the beginning of the AI outbreak, Chile kept the OIE and all of its trading partners permanently and fully informed. Furthermore, the SAG suspended all its exports of poultry products as soon as it received confirmation of the highly pathogenic strain of AI. Exports recommenced only when Chile received a clean bill of health.
