

# California Poultry Letter

University of California • Cooperative Extension

January-February 2002

## California Egg Quality Assurance Program (CEQAP) Update

The recent decision by the California Egg Commission (CEC) to discontinue assessments has left the CEQAP without funding for a facilitator and veterinary consultant. Participants in CEQAP have not been assessed fees in the past because funds have been available from the CEC to supplement support from agencies, organizations and University of California, Cooperative Extension. When the program was started, funding for a facilitator was provided by the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) and USDA-APHIS. After the initiation of the program this cost was picked up by CEC. The Commission also provided funding to prepare video tapes of the educational programs and for research.

### Program Costs

Currently CEQAP participants are being asked to provide token support to fund a CEQAP facilitator and a veterinary consultant. We know that industry profits are low and the egg business is very competitive. However, CEQAP participants should be aware that the CEQAP program has support from government agencies, the University and the Pacific Egg and Poultry Association (PePa) which collectively contribute over \$500,000 annually. In contrast the individual fees now requested are very small.

CEQAP members should be aware that the CDFA continues to provide major support for CEQAP by providing oversight inspections, any needed tracebacks, laboratory support from California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory, staff support for research, and advisory support. This I would conservatively estimate at \$500,000 per year. The University provides support for educational programs and

research that I estimate at \$50,000 per year. The PePa organizes and attends meetings, provides vital communications, maintains and distributes educational materials, records, program brochures and videos; estimated cost \$6,000 per year. In addition the USDA, FDA, California Department of Health Services and industry volunteers have provided their time and travel costs to participate on CEQAP advisory committees. Grants from USDA-FSIS (\$50,000), CDFA (\$12,000) and industry (\$45,000) have funded production of professional videos, a web site and follow-up studies on success of the educational program.

CEQAP offers you many advantages not the least of which is the partnership agreement which provides for CDFA to conduct farm investigations in the event of a traceback from an SE outbreak.

If in the future FDA promulgates egg production regulations, it is likely that the CEQAP will satisfy the requirements. Non-participants will need to demonstrate an equivalent program. CEQAP participants are doing something extra to protect the safety of the eggs they produce. They are encouraged to take advantage of this by providing customers with a statement describing the role of CEQAP in assuring egg safety and quality.

If you are a CEQAP participant and did not receive a letter and invoice from PePa, please telephone Debbie Murdock (916) 441-0801.

*Ralph A. Ernst*  
*Extension Poultry Specialist*

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# Avian Influenza Revisited

We have reported on avian influenza numerous times in this publication. The complexity of the clinical disease syndromes caused by avian influenza virus, the effect of infection on trade, and the difficulties associated with prevention, warrant the extra consideration.

Avian influenza viruses can be divided into high and low pathogenicity based on the mortality they cause in eight 4-6-week old chickens after 10 days. It is important to understand that this classification might not accurately reflect an individual virus strain's impact on commercial poultry flocks. Mortality of 1-10% in a commercial flock over the course of 10 days is substantial. However, a strain of virus capable of causing this level of mortality, might not cause mortality in the eight chicks used to classify the virus. Further, other disease agents already present in the flock, may add to the ability of the avian influenza virus to cause mortality. So, in chickens without other disease agents (like the ones used to classify the virus), the virus may not have much effect at all. Finally, the age and strain of bird may affect the outcome of an avian influenza infection. Thus, a virus that might cause significant mortality in a large commercial flock might be classified as a low pathogenicity strain.

**Preventing an avian influenza infection requires strict attention to biosecurity.** Avian influenza is usually spread to new flocks of chickens by people and equipment from chickens that are already infected. That is for several reasons:

- Chickens are more resistant to infection with most strains of avian influenza virus than other types of birds. So, in order for a virus to grow and spread in chickens, it has to become adapted to grow in them. Once adapted, it can spread very rapidly.

- People who work with poultry and equipment used in poultry houses are very likely to come into contact with other poultry. Therefore, it is their traffic between poultry farms that poses the greatest risk for A.I. transmittal.
- Most commercial chickens are kept in covered buildings where they are minimally exposed to wild birds. This management practice dramatically decreases their exposure to disease agents carried by wild birds and decreases the likelihood of an introduction of avian influenza from wild birds. Because wild birds carry so many types of influenza viruses including the highly pathogenic variety, every effort should be made to prevent their access to commercial poultry flocks.

Avian influenza can cause a variety of disease syndromes. One of the most sensitive and reliable indications of infection is a drop in egg production. For birds not in production, a decrease in feed consumption might be the only indication of an influenza infection. More commonly, however, there will also be some subtle coughing or snicking, wet droppings and increased water consumption. The unexpected appearance of these subtle signs of disease should prompt a call to a veterinary practitioner or delivery of sick and dead birds to the diagnostic laboratory. Avian influenza should be diagnosed as rapidly as possible in order to prevent its spread to other flocks.

Avian influenza infections occur in commercial poultry all over the world despite our best efforts to prevent it. When those infections occur, they can disrupt free trade, impede production, and reduce profits. Unfortunately, there is no treatment for this disease and eradication is a slow, expensive and time-consuming process. Where it is possible, prevention is the best policy when it comes to avian influenza.

*Carol Cardona  
Extension Poultry Veterinarian*

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## National Poultry and Egg Production Standards?

The Food Marketing Institute, the major trade association of the supermarket industry, and the National Council of Chain Restaurants, a unit of the National Retail Federation, have created a professional third-party Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. This committee is composed mostly of academics and is working with various industry associations to develop a set of guidelines for farm animal care that can be quantitatively measured by independent third party auditors. It is likely that some audited program of poultry rearing standards will be required by many buyers of poultry and eggs in the near future. Producer organizations like the National Chicken Council, United Egg Producers and the National Turkey Federation are interacting with this committee in the development of these productions standards.

## National Egg Quality School in Sacramento

This year the 3 day egg school will be held in Sacramento at the Holiday Inn Northeast. The program includes information on egg quality, egg grades, egg regulations, quality assurance programs, HACCP, hands on sessions on egg candling, plant sanitation, etc. If you would like a copy of the printed program contact Debbie Murdock at PePa 916/441-0801. This is an in-depth school ideal for someone with limited background who needs to learn all about egg processing, egg quality and egg grading.

## 2002 Calendar

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### \*March 20-21

Midwest Poultry Federation Convention, River Centre, St. Paul, MN. For more information visit the website at: <http://www.midwestpoultry.com>

### \*May 1-4

51st Western Poultry Disease Conference, Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico.

### \*May 7-10

Pacific Egg and Poultry Association Convention, Harrah's Stateline, Lake Tahoe. For more information please contact Debbie Murdock at 916/441-0801 or visit their website at: <http://www.pacificegg.org>

### \*May 20-23

National Egg Quality School, Holiday Inn Northeast, Sacramento, CA. To enroll e-mail Candy Byers <[cbyers@purdue.edu](mailto:cbyers@purdue.edu)> or telephone 765/494-8510. Tuition \$395.00 before 4/1/02; participants also pay for their lodging.

*\*Approved for CEQAP Credit*

Visit our website at:

<http://animalscience.ucdavis.edu/avian>

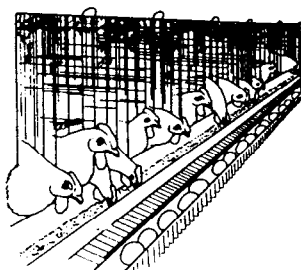
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