

Province-wide plan for avian influenza outbreak

The Western Cape government has initiated a province-wide recovery plan to combat the impact of the avian influenza outbreak on agriculture. To date, two million birds have been culled and immediate production losses of more than R800m are projected.



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Recently, Alan Winde, Minister of Economic Opportunities, and the Western Cape government team driving the response plan, hosted a media briefing on the status of the disease in the province.

In response to this outbreak, which is the first of its kind in South Africa, the Western Cape government has convened a Joint Operations Centre (JOC). The JOC is being headed by the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, the Provincial Disaster Management Centre, the Department of Social Development and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning.

Minister Winde said: “The Western Cape is the worst affected province in South Africa. In some regions, poultry production farms are clustered in a specific area. In other provinces, cases have occurred at locations far removed from these hubs.

“In the Western Cape, the outbreak has hit the Paardeberg area – the region with the highest concentration of poultry farms.”

Departments stand together

Anton Bredell, Minister of Environmental Affairs, Local Government and Development Planning said the Provincial Disaster Management Centre (PDMC) is assisting the Department of Agriculture (DOA) with the coordination of steps to mitigate the effects of the avian influenza outbreak. “The PDMC is also in constant communication with the National Disaster Management centre and DAFF.”

Bredell said the PDMC has established a working committee that includes representatives from all the departments that could play a role in effectively managing the crisis, including the National Departments of Labour, Social Development, SASSA, Environmental Affairs, Economic Development, and others.

“A big part of what we’re busy with currently includes looking after the wellbeing of affected farm workers. In this regard, the departments of Social Development and Agriculture are leading the process. SASSA and Labour are also on board. In addition, the Department of Environmental Affairs’ Waste Management Unit is ensuring the safe disposal of carcasses on affected farms. These are some of the major initiatives at the moment.”

The JOC has initiated the following measures:

- Requested the National Disaster Management Centre’s guidance to potentially declare the outbreak a provincial disaster
- Facilitating access to financial and training schemes for workers who have lost their jobs as a result of the outbreak
- The industry is liaising with the National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Agriculture on vaccination
- Agricultural economists have started mapping the potential impact of the outbreak on jobs and food security

The JOC meets weekly to share updates in the following key areas:

Economic impact

Lead: Department of Agriculture/Department of Economic Development and Tourism

- Agricultural economists have started mapping the potential economic impact of the AI outbreak, and the Department of Agriculture is engaging industry and experts to provide further insights
- Such an assessment is normally done only after the impacts of a disaster are fully realised. At this stage, due to the complexity and dynamics of the current situation, economists have high-level estimates of the possible economic impact. These scenarios depend heavily on the specific assumptions made and how the situation will unfold in the coming weeks
- A conservative estimate puts the immediate cost of production losses of both hens and eggs in the region of R800m, not counting additional costs of labour and materials to do composting
- The overall economic impact will be more significant as many of the farms will lose income for a prolonged period due to quarantine restrictions and time taken to get back to full production, with an anticipated impact on jobs
- In terms of egg prices, moderate increases in the short term are projected, which could likely return to normal levels relatively quickly. This is of concern as more than 900,000 households buy eggs in the province and another 1.2 million households buy chicken meat – the main animal protein source for the majority of poor households

Environmental mitigation steps

Lead: Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEADP)

- A monitoring system was put in place to deal with the environmental impacts of the treatment or disposal of the dead birds. This was done in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Environmental Affairs and municipalities. The emergency procedures in Section 30A of the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 is utilised to authorise the management option chosen by the owner of the farm/business

- The procedure, a form to be completed by the farm and submitted to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, allows for the monitoring of the biosecurity by the Department of Agriculture and the environmental impacts by the DEADP in collaboration with the municipalities in the affected area

Projected socio-economic impact

Lead: Department of Social Development (DSD)

- The loss of jobs could lead to further pressure on the families of the affected farm workers. This could have a further impact on poverty and hunger, and substance abuse

- DSD will work closely with the Department of Agriculture and the South African Social Security Agency, doing assessments of affected families, so that they can be linked to social relief benefits

- A humanitarian relief plan for the affected farming community will be drafted this week, in partnership with the relevant departments

Update on latest cases

After a case is confirmed by positive lab tests, it is reported to the National Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF). DAFF officially notifies the OIE (also known as the World Organisation for Animal Health) as well as our trading partners. The OIE then notifies its 71 member countries, which will then put preventative measures in place.

In respect of the 36 confirmed cases, the formal notification process has been concluded, and the below cases can, therefore, be made public.

	District	Species Group	Species
1	Central Karoo	Backyard/hobby birds	Chickens
2	West Coast	Backyard/hobby birds	Geese, chickens
3	West Coast	Backyard/hobby birds	Geese, chickens
4	City of Cape Town	Backyard/hobby birds	Swans
5	West Coast	Backyard/hobby birds	Chickens, ducks, turkeys
6	West Coast	Backyard/hobby birds	Chickens
7	West Coast	Backyard/hobby birds	Geese
8	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
9	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
10	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
11	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
12	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
13	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
14	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
15	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
16	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
17	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
18	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
19	Eden	Commercial ostriches	Ostriches
20	City of Cape Town	Commercial poultry	Layer chickens
21	Cape Winelands	Commercial poultry	Layer chickens
22	Cape Winelands	Commercial poultry	Layer chickens
23	West Coast	Commercial poultry	Layer chickens
24	City of Cape Town	Commercial poultry	Ducks

25	City of Cape Town	Commercial poultry	Layer chickens
26	City of Cape Town	Commercial poultry	Ducks
27	City of Cape Town	Commercial poultry	Layer chickens
28	West Coast	Commercial poultry	Broiler breeder chickens
29	Cape Winelands	Wild bird	Peregrine falcon
30	Overberg	Wild bird	Guinea fowl
31	Cape Winelands	Wild bird	Laughing dove
32	Eden	Wild bird	Rock pigeon, Spur-winged goose
33	Eden	Wild bird	Guinea fowl
34	Eden	Wild bird	Blue crane
35	Overberg	Wild bird	Guinea fowl
36	West Coast	Wild bird	House sparrow

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