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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Office of the Secretary

[Docket No. 04-018-1]

Declaration of Extraordinary Emergency Because of Avian Influenza in Texas

Avian influenza (AI) has been confirmed in a broiler chicken flock in Gonzales County, TX. AI viruses, which can infect chickens, turkeys, pheasants, quail, ducks, geese, and guinea fowl, as well as a wide variety of other birds, can be classified into low pathogenic and highly pathogenic strains based on the severity of the illness they cause. Most AI virus strains are low pathogenic and typically cause mild clinical signs and low mortality in infected birds. However, some low pathogenic virus strains are capable of mutating under field conditions into highly pathogenic viruses, which cause more illness and high mortality in infected birds.

Exposure of poultry to migratory waterfowl and the international movement of poultry, poultry equipment, and people pose risks for introducing highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) into U.S. poultry. Once introduced, the disease can be spread from bird to bird by direct contact. HPAI viruses can also be spread by manure, equipment, vehicles, egg flats, crates, and people whose clothing or shoes have come in contact with the virus.

On February 17, 2004, routine surveillance samples taken from the Gonzales County flock and sent to the Texas Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory were identified as preliminarily positive for an H5 type AI virus. Upon learning that the flock of broilers had elevated death rates, the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), in accordance with standard practice in such situations, dispatched a foreign animal disease diagnostician to collect additional samples and

information from the farm. These samples were sent to the Texas State laboratory and to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, IA, which is the U.S. national reference laboratory for foreign animal diseases.

On February 19, 2004, test results indicated that the flock had H5N2 avian influenza. Since H5 and H7 strains can be either low pathogenic or highly pathogenic, additional tests were conducted. Genetic sequencing was completed on February 23, 2004, the results of which indicated a highly pathogenic form of AI. International standards mandate reporting these sequencing results to the Office International des Epizooties, the world animal health organization. The Department is conducting further laboratory testing to confirm the pathogenicity.

The flock of approximately 6,600 broiler chickens was depopulated. The Department and the TAHC are in the process of conducting an epidemiological investigation and surveillance testing within a 10-mile radius of the affected property.

The existence of HPAI in Texas represents a threat to the U.S. poultry and bird industries. It constitutes a real danger to the national economy and a potential serious burden on interstate and foreign commerce. The Department has reviewed the measures being taken by Texas to control and eradicate HPAI and has consulted with the appropriate State Government and Indian tribal officials in Texas. Based on such review and consultation, the Department has determined that the measures being taken by the State are inadequate to control or eradicate HPAI. Therefore, the Department has determined that an extraordinary emergency exists because of HPAI in Texas.

This declaration of extraordinary emergency authorizes the Secretary to (1) hold, seize, treat, apply other remedial actions to, destroy (including preventative slaughter), or otherwise dispose of, any animal, article, facility, or means of conveyance if the Secretary determines the action is necessary to prevent the dissemination of HPAI and (2) prohibit or restrict the movement or use within the State of Texas, or any portion of the State of Texas, of any animal or article, means of conveyance, or facility if the Secretary determines

that the prohibition or restriction is necessary to prevent the dissemination of HPAI. The appropriate State Government and Indian tribal officials in Texas have been informed of these facts.

Effective Date: This declaration of extraordinary emergency shall become effective February 23, 2004.

Ann M. Veneman,

Secretary of Agriculture.

[FR Doc. 04-4587 Filed 3-1-04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-34-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 04-013-1]

Notice of Request for Extension of Approval of an Information Collection

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Extension of approval of an information collection; comment request.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice announces the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's intention to request an extension of approval of an information collection in support of the regulations for the importation of poultry meat and products and live poultry from the Mexican States of Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatan.

DATES: We will consider all comments that we receive on or before May 3, 2004.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments by postal mail/commercial delivery or by e-mail. If you use postal mail/commercial delivery, please send four copies of your comment (an original and three copies) to: Docket No. 04-013-1, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3C71, 4700 River Road Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. Please state that your comment refers to Docket No. 04-013-1. If you use e-mail, address your comment to regulations@aphis.usda.gov. Your comment must be contained in the body of your message; do not send attached files. Please include your name and address in your message and "Docket No. 04-013-1" on the subject line.

You may read any comments that we receive on this docket in our reading room. The reading room is located in room 1141 of the USDA South Building, 14th Street and Independence Avenue SW., Washington, DC. Normal reading room hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. To be sure someone is there to help you, please call (202) 690-2817 before coming.

APHIS documents published in the **Federal Register**, and related information, including the names of organizations and individuals who have commented on APHIS dockets, are available on the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppd/rad/webrepor.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For information on the regulations regarding the importation of poultry meat and products and live poultry from the Mexican States of Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatan, contact Dr. Hatim Gubara, Senior Staff Veterinarian, Regionalization Evaluation Services Staff, VS, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 38, Riverdale, MD 20737-1231; (301) 734-4356. For copies of more detailed information on the information collection, contact Mrs. Celeste Sickles, APHIS' Information Collection Coordinator, at (301) 734-7477.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Exotic Newcastle Disease; Importation of Poultry Meat and Products and Live Poultry from the Mexican States of Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatan.

OMB Number: 0579-0228.

Type of Request: Extension of approval of an information collection.

Abstract: Under the Animal Health Protection Act (7 U.S.C. 8301-8317), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, regulates the importation of animals and animal products into the United States to prevent the introduction of animal diseases, such as exotic Newcastle disease (END), into the United States.

The regulations in 9 CFR part 94 allow the importation of poultry meat and products and live poultry from the Mexican States of Campeche, Quintana Roo, and Yucatan under conditions designed to ensure that the poultry meat and products and live poultry will not transmit END. This disease is not present in those States but exists in other parts of Mexico. The conditions for importation require, among other things, certification from a full-time salaried veterinary officer of the Government of Mexico that the poultry meat or products or live poultry originated in an END-free region and

have not been commingled with poultry meat or products or live poultry from END-affected regions.

We are asking the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to approve our use of this information collection activity for an additional 3 years.

The purpose of this notice is to solicit comments from the public (as well as affected agencies) concerning our information collection. These comments will help us:

(1) Evaluate whether the collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the Agency, including whether the information will have practical utility;

(2) Evaluate the accuracy of our estimate of the burden of the information collection, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used;

(3) Enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and

(4) Minimize the burden of the information collection on those who are to respond, through use, as appropriate, of automated, electronic, mechanical, and other collection technologies, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses.

Estimate of burden: The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response.

Respondents: Federal animal health authorities in Mexico.

Estimated annual number of respondents: 5.

Estimated annual number of responses per respondent: 10.

Estimated annual number of responses: 50.

Estimated total annual burden on respondents: 50 hours. (Due to averaging, the total annual burden hours may not equal the product of the annual number of responses multiplied by the reporting burden per response.)

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Done in Washington, DC, this 25th day of February 2004.

Kevin Shea,

Acting Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 04-4589 Filed 3-1-04; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-34-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

[Docket No. 03-100-2]

Public Meeting; Veterinary Biologics

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of public meeting.

SUMMARY: This is the second notice to producers and users of veterinary biological products, and other interested individuals, that we will be holding our 12th public meeting to discuss regulatory and policy issues related to the manufacture, distribution, and use of veterinary biological products. This notice provides information on the agenda, as well as the dates, times, and place of the meeting. It also indicates a contact person for obtaining registration forms, lodging information, and copies of the agenda.

DATES: The public meeting will be held Wednesday, April 7, through Friday, April 9, 2004, from 1 p.m. to approximately 5 p.m. on Wednesday, 8 a.m. to approximately 5 p.m. on Thursday, and from 8 a.m. to approximately noon on Friday.

ADDRESSES: The public meeting will be held in the Scheman Building at the Iowa State Center, Iowa State University, Ames, IA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Kathy Clark, Center for Veterinary Biologics, VS, APHIS, 510 South 17th Street, Suite 104, Ames, IA 50010-8197; phone (515) 232-5785, fax (515) 232-7120; or e-mail Kathryn.K.Clark@aphis.usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In a notice published in the **Federal Register** on November 14, 2003 (68 FR 64585, Docket No. 03-100-1), we announced that we would be holding our 12th annual veterinary biologics public meeting and requested that interested persons submit suggestions for agenda topics. Based on the responses and on other considerations, the agenda for the 12th public meeting will include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Biologics use and role in emergency management;
- Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) experience, epidemiology aspects, and impact on veterinary biologics;
- Animal health safeguarding;
- Autogenous biologics;
- Possession, use, and transfer of biological agents and toxins, 9 CFR part 121, implementation and impact;
- Research and development of biologics;