Hy-Line North America: Planning for Avian Influenza

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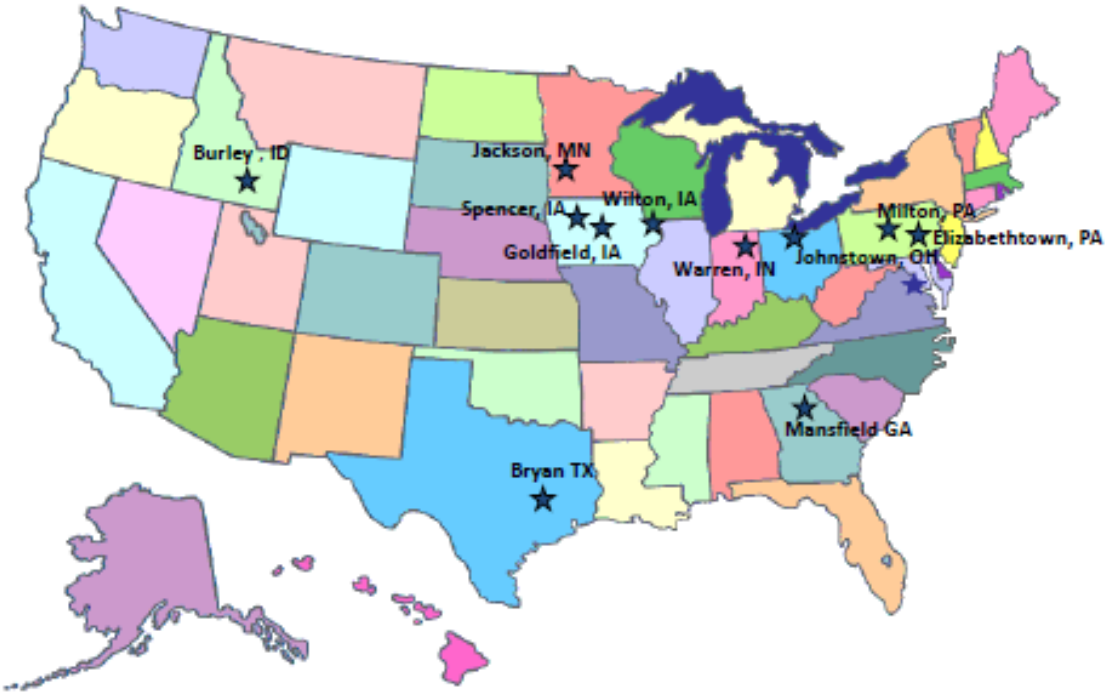
Hy-Line North America is one of the main distributors of day-old commercial layer chicks in the United States and British Columbia, and currently operates with a total of 11 hatcheries and over 100 breeder flocks located in 8 states (Figure 1). To meet production demands and ensure we provide the highest quality day-old chicks to customers, we have an ever-growing production team of location managers, breeder managers, compliance managers, hatchery managers, veterinarians, and specialists.

Figure 1. Hy-Line North America Locations



Prior to the 2014-2015 highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak, Hy-Line North America had biosecurity programs and other protocols in place to prevent important poultry diseases from entering our breeder flocks. Although no Hy-Line North America farms or facilities were infected with HPAI in the recent outbreak, some of our sites were in close proximity to HPAI affected premises and control/surveillance zones. Throughout the HPAI outbreak and during the aftermath, we developed and implemented the following strategies across all of our locations:

- Prioritizing site-specific biosecurity programs.
- Improving our avian influenza (AI) surveillance testing.
- Preparing detailed site-specific emergency response plans.

- Providing continuing education and updates to Hy-Line North America employees and cooperators.

1. Prioritizing Site-Specific Biosecurity Programs
Last year's HPAI outbreak was a constant reminder that our biosecurity programs must be maintained to prevent HPAI introduction. The USDA determined that many farms across the Midwest were infected with HPAI due to poor biosecurity practices, and concluded that cross-contamination between infected and non-infected farms were major contributing factors to the spread of the HPAI virus. We made it our mission to assess biosecurity risks across all Hy-Line North America farms and hatcheries and address major areas of concern with people (e.g. managers, contract crews, vendors, visitors, etc.), equipment, and facilities. Each location worked to develop and evaluate site-specific biosecurity programs for all facilities. These programs will not only help prevent HPAI, but will also assist in our Mycoplasma and Salmonella prevention programs and reduce the risk of exposing our flocks to other important poultry diseases.

2. Avian Influenza Surveillance Testing
All Hy-Line North America breeder flocks and hatcheries participate in the National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP), which is designed to monitor and eradicate important poultry diseases, including Mycoplasma gallisepticum (MG), Mycoplasma synoviae (MS), avian influenza (AI), and Salmonella Enteritidis (SE). We utilize state diagnostic laboratories and our state-of-the-art technical services laboratory to test for these diseases. Our technical services department maintains stringent testing schedules to monitor the disease status of all our breeder flocks. During the recent HPAI outbreak, we increased AI surveillance testing at locations in close proximity to HPAI-positive sites and at critical flock events (e.g. pullet movement).

3. Emergency Response Planning
In addition to increasing surveillance testing and improving biosecurity, all Hy-Line North America locations developed site-specific emergency response plans in order to quickly and efficiently respond to a HPAI-positive diagnosis. Each emergency response plan addresses staffing and supply/equipment needs, rapid depopulation, and disposal methods in as much detail as possible. Our main focus is on the ability to keep a HPAI-positive site contained and prevent viral spread to non-infected sites.

4. Education
One of the most critical components for compliance with our programs is continuing education of employees and cooperators. It was important to keep all Hy-Line North America employees and cooperators informed about the recent HPAI outbreak, as well as, what changes were made to a location's biosecurity programs, surveillance testing, and emergency response plans. We accomplished this through regular HPAI updates, conference calls, and meetings with employees and cooperators to personally address questions and concerns. Everything starts with employee buy-in, and compliance to our programs is dependent upon understanding why the procedures are important.

All of the strategies listed above are important to reducing biosecurity risks, preventing HPAI and other disease introductions, and responding efficiently and effectively to a foreign animal

disease outbreak. As a collective industry, we must learn from past events and continue to improve. Although large HPAI outbreaks may occur once a decade, we cannot afford to reinvent the wheel at each event.