

Why Are the Chickens So Sick?

By Joel Salatin



Robert W Malone MD, MS 
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As the nation suffers through yet another High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) outbreak, questioning the orthodox narrative is more important than ever. At a time when people are

screaming about overpopulation and the world's inability to feed itself, surely we humans need to figure out how to reduce these kinds of losses.

Numbers change each day, but at the last count about 60 million chickens (mainly laying hens) and turkeys died in the last year. A bit more than a decade ago it was 50 million. Are these cycles inevitable? Are the experts funneling information to the public more trustworthy than those who controlled press releases during 2020's covid outbreak?

If thinking people learned only one thing from the covid pandemic, it was that official government narratives are politically slanted and often untrue. In this latest HPAI outbreak, perhaps the most egregious departure from truth is the notion that the birds have died as a result of the disease and that euthanasia for survivors is the best and only option.

First, of the nearly 60 million claimed deaths, perhaps no more than a couple million have actually died from HPAI. The rest have been killed in a draconian sterilization protocol. Using the word euthanized rather than the more proper word exterminated clouds the actual story. Euthanizing refers to putting an animal out of its misery. In other words, it's going to die and is in pain or an incurable condition.

Very few of the birds killed are in pain or even symptomatically sick. If one chicken in a house of a million tests positive for HPAI, the government brings full law enforcement force to the farm to guarantee all live birds die. Quickly.

In not a single flock have all the birds died from HPAI. Every flock has survivors. To be sure, most are exterminated prior to survivors being identified. But in the cases of delayed extermination, a few birds appear immune to the disease. To be sure, HPAI is and can be deadly, but it never kills everything.

The policy of mass extermination without regard to immunity, without even researching why some birds flourish while all around are dying, is insane. The most fundamental principles of animal husbandry and breeding demand that farmers select for healthy immune systems. We farmers have been doing that for millennia. We pick the most robust specimens as genetic material to propagate, whether it's plants, animals, or microbes.

But in its wisdom, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA—Usduh) has no interest in selecting, protecting, and then propagating the healthy survivors. The policy is clear and simple: kill everything that ever contacted the diseased birds. The second part of the policy is also simple: find a vaccine to stop HPAI.

If a farmer wanted to save the survivors and run a test on his own to try to breed birds with HPAI immunity, gun-toting government agents prohibit him from doing so. The scorched earth policy is the only option even though it doesn't seem to be working. In fact, the cycles are coming faster and seem to be affecting more birds. Someone ought to question the efficacy.

Some do. When HPAI came through our area of Virginia about 15 years ago, federal veterinarians from around the nation descended to oversee the extermination. Two of them had heard about our pastured poultry operation and asked to come out for a visit on their own personal time. They were not together; they came a couple of weeks apart, independently. Both of them told me that they knew the reason for the outbreak: too many birds too densely packed in too many houses too geographically close together. But then both of them said that if they breathed that idea publicly, they would be fired the next day.

Talk about censorship. In its Feb. 24 edition, the *Wall Street Journal* headlined "[America Is Losing Bird-Flu Battle](#)." Interestingly, while the article touts the official narrative about wild birds spreading the disease and farmers spreading it on their shoes, one farmer dares to say that "his



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largest facility houses about 4 million cage-free chickens, which are too many chickens in one locale. ‘We would never do that again,’ he said. New facilities will be smaller, housing about one million birds each, he said, and spaced farther apart to help thwart the threat of continued outbreak.”

Yet a couple of paragraphs over, the article quotes Dr. John Clifford, former US chief veterinary officer, as saying “It’s everywhere.” If it’s everywhere, what difference does reducing flock sizes and putting more space between houses make? Clearly the farmer in this story has a hunch shared by my two visiting federal veterinarians many years ago: too many, too dense, too close.

To be sure, even backyard flocks are susceptible to HPAI, but many of these miniature flocks are on filthy dirt spots and suffer terrible hygienic conditions. Even so, keeping a million birds in a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) happy and hygienic is harder than a backyard flock, and the disease data supports this. The USDA and the industry desperately want to blame wild birds, backyard flocks, and dirty shoes rather than looking in the mirror and realizing this is nature’s way of screaming “Enough!”

“Enough abuse. Enough disrespect. Enough fecal particulate air creating abrasions in my tender mucous membranes.” When Joel Arthur Barker wrote [Paradigms](#) and brought that word into common usage, one of his axioms was that paradigms always eventually exceed their point of efficiency. The poultry industry assumed that if 100 birds in a house was good, 200 was better. With the advent of antibiotics and vaccines, houses increased in size and bird density. But nature bats last.

For the record, any agricultural system that views wildlife as a liability is an inherently anti-ecological model. The *WSJ* article notes that “workers have installed netting over lagoons and other spots where wild birds gather.” Lagoons are inherently anti-ecological. They are cesspools

of disease and filth; nature never creates manure lagoons. In nature, animals spread manure out over the landscape where it can be a blessing, not a curse like a lagoon. Perhaps the real culprit is the industry making manure lagoons infecting wild ducks, not the other way around. It's guilty by association, like saying since I see fire trucks at car wrecks, the fire trucks must be causing the car wrecks.

Notice the kind of bad guy slant on this *WSJ* sentence: "Buzzards, wild ducks or pests that sneak into barns also can spread the flu virus through mucus or saliva." Doesn't this read like a proverbial conspiracy, with wild things sneaking around? It's all eerily similar to the covid virus sneaking around, needing to be contained with quarantines and masks. One feather contains enough HPAI to affect a million birds. You can't lock down a chicken house from an errant feather or its microscopic molecules from wafting into a house. It's absurd.

If our current ag policy is insane, what is a better alternative? My first suggestion is to save the survivors and begin breeding them. That's a no-brainer. If a flock gets HPAI, let it run its course. It'll kill the ones it'll kill but in a few days the survivors will be obvious. Keep those and put them in a breeding program. The beautiful thing about chickens is that they mature and propagate fast enough so that in a year you can move forward two generations. That's relatively fast. Let survival determine tomorrow's genetic pool.

Second, how about working on conditions that increase hygiene and happiness? Yes, I said happiness. All animals have optimal herd and flock sizes. For example, you never see more than a couple hundred wild turkeys together. Even when populations are high in an area, they break up into smaller groups rather than joining forces in flocks of 1,000. Other birds do join up in big flocks. Why the difference?

Nobody has made a definitive study of why, but we do know that optimal sizes do exist for stress-free living. For chickens, it's about 1,000. An elderly poultry industry scientist visited our farm once and told me that if houses would break up chickens into 1,000-bird groups it would virtually eliminate diseases. He said it was okay to have 10,000 birds in a house as long as they were in 1,000-bird units. That way their social structure can function in a natural interaction. Animals have a hierarchy of bullies and timids. That social structure breaks down above optimal size.

With most herbivores, the size is huge, as noted by herd sizes on the Serengeti and Bison on the American plains. Honey bees divide when the hive reaches a certain size. Elk have optimal herd sizes. Mountain goats are in small flocks. Wild pigs too seek a group size seldom exceeding 100. The point is that the first line of defense is to figure out where the stress-free sweet spot is and respect it.

Finally, treat the chickens like chickens. In addition to proper flock size, give them fresh pasture in which to run and scratch. Not dirt yards. Not little aprons around a CAFO. With mobile shelter, on our farm we move the flocks every day or so to fresh pasture. That keeps them on new ground that's been host free for an extended period of rest. They don't sleep, eat, and live every moment of every day on their toilet.

The American Pastured Poultry Producers Association (APPPA) is a trade organization promoting protocols for this kind of immune-boosting model. Thousands of practitioners adhere to mobile infrastructure that allows appropriate-sized flocks access to fresh air, sunlight, bugs, worms, and succulent green material. On our farm, we use the Millennium Feathernet and Eggmobile, welcoming wild ducks and red-winged blackbirds into the vicinity all as part of a symbiotic ecological nest.

While I don't want to sound flippant or above HPAI susceptibility, incident rates definitely indicate less vulnerability in well-managed pastured flocks. Creating an immune-building protocol surely merits research as much as overriding the immune system with vaccines and trying to stay ahead of disease mutations and adaptations with human cleverness. How about humbly seeking nature for solutions rather than relying on hubris?

The parallels between HPAI expert orthodoxy and covid orthodoxy are too numerous to mention. Fear porn is rampant in our culture. The HPAI worry feeds food worry, which makes people clamor for government security. People will accept just about anything if they're afraid. Does anyone really think human cleverness is going to beat migratory ducks? Really? Think it through and then embrace a more natural remedy: well-managed decentralized pastured poultry with appropriate flock sizes.

[Joel Salatin](#)

Joel F. Salatin is an American farmer, lecturer, and author. Salatin raises livestock on his Polyface Farm in Swoope, Virginia, in the Shenandoah Valley. Meat from the farm is sold by direct marketing to consumers and restaurants.

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Lois Lassiter Writes Radicalpony's Newsletter Mar 15 Liked by Robert W Malone MD, MS

As veterinarian, I have a bone to pick on this one. NOT with you, but with the practices currently employed in these things.

We learned(I graduated in 1996) all about depop/repop wherein a population of production animals, chickens, hogs, etc that are intensely farmed can be intentionally depopulated to prevent or control the spread of infectious disease.

Now into my career in decades, I have begun to question this advice.

H5N1 is endemic in the migratory wild bird population...we can depopulate all the domestic fowl that we want and it would still exist. For some reason, the wild birds are not becoming extinct...in fact, they are likely developing robust immunity.

I think when they say they lost 60 million birds, they should be specific about how many they KILLED and how many DIED from the flu. Yes, H5N1 has a high mortality rate, but it's not 100%. Once a house is infected, wouldn't it be better long term, to allow the robust to survive and then use those for breeding stock?

I remember when foot and mouth hit the UK and they killed all those hooved stock and foot and mouth isn't even usually fatal.

The production farming gurus need to reevaluate their methods in my opinion. But, what do I know? I'm just a dog doctor.

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ES Mar 15 Liked by Robert W Malone MD, MS

Joel Salatin is amazing. Thank you for having him guest post and highlight this important issue

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