



Pennsylvania  
**Department of Agriculture**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Tuesday, October 28, 2025**

**Contact:** Shannon Powers, [shpowers@pa.gov](mailto:shpowers@pa.gov), 717.603.2056

**Protecting PA Farms: Pennsylvania Veterinary Labs Are Key to  
Disease Prevention, First Line of Defense for Poultry**

*Pennsylvania continues aggressive, coordinated response to avian influenza outbreak threatening the state's \$7.1 billion poultry industry.*

*More than 1,319 of Pennsylvania's 10,361 poultry farms are in Lancaster County, where a state-led team of experts is responding to confirmed infections at six locations, with a total of 57,900 birds.*

**Harrisburg, PA** – Today, Agriculture **Deputy Secretary for Animal Health and Food Safety Lisa Graybeal** led a tour of the Pennsylvania Veterinary Laboratory – one of three labs that are the first line of defense in the ongoing battle against Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Graybeal, along with poultry experts and farmers whose flocks have been hit by the virus, reminded poultry producers that biosecurity is their best prevention, and in the event their flocks are infected, HPAI Recovery Grants are available to help them recover from their losses and get back to business.

Almost always fatal to birds, the virus poses tremendous risk to the poultry industry, one of the top three sectors in Pennsylvania's \$132.5 billion agriculture industry. More than 1,319 of Pennsylvania's 10,361 poultry farms are in Lancaster County, where a state-led team of experts is responding to confirmed infections at six locations, with a total of 57,900 birds affected.

Since February 2022, when the outbreak of the current strain began, Pennsylvania has lost more than 7.1 million birds in 41 commercial flocks and 59 backyard flocks in 23 counties.

"Testing to monitor and detect Hi-Path Avian Influenza has been an indispensable tool to minimize the damage during what has been the biggest animal health crisis in American history," said **Deputy Secretary Graybeal**. "Pennsylvania's highly skilled, dedicated team of experts working in the veterinary labs, barns, and fields across the state has been unwavering in their devotion to our farmers. And the **Shapiro Administration** has been unwavering in our support for Pennsylvania farmers, bringing the right people, and the right funding and resources to the table help them recover."

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's [Pennsylvania Veterinary Laboratory](#) is one of three labs making up the Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System – a key part of the Shapiro Administration's effort to fight HPAI - along with Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences' [Animal Diagnostic Laboratory](#) in University Park, and the [New Bolton Center](#) at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine in Kennett Square.

Together, the three labs tested 672,342 samples from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, including more than 200,000 poultry samples and more than 29,000 cattle samples tested for HPAI. Testing is a critical measure to ensure safe sales and export of poultry, and to detect disease and minimize the risk of its spread. PADLS holds the highest level of accreditation for animal health labs from the **American Association of Veterinary Diagnosticians**.

“What farmers do on their farms every day is as important as what happens in our labs,” said **Pennsylvania State Veterinarian Dr. Alex Hamberg**. “Biosecurity on farms goes hand-in-hand with testing and monitoring to prevent animal disease. When every farm has a biosecurity plan, and when everyone who sets foot on that farm follows the procedures in the plan set specifically for that farm, disease risks are lower, and if disease hits, recovery is quicker.”

A fourth veterinary lab, on Penn State's Beaver Campus, is undergoing renovations. **Governor Josh Shapiro** secured the **\$6 million to fund** the new lab in the bipartisan 2024-25 budget. When renovations are completed, the new lab will increase Pennsylvania's capacity to respond to animal disease outbreaks, ultimately speeding diagnoses, lowering business costs, and helping to protect farms in the western part of the state. **Governor Shapiro's 2025-26 budget** proposal includes **\$2 million** to fund the new lab's operations.

Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences has long been at the forefront of combating avian influenza, leveraging decades of research, outreach and emergency planning to protect Pennsylvania's poultry industry. The college has played a central role in responding to major outbreaks — including HPAI crises in 1983, 2014–15, and 2022–23 — working closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, USDA, and industry partners. Faculty and Penn State Extension educators have guided producers on biosecurity, outbreak response and rapid testing, helping to limit the spread of the virus and reduce economic losses.

Building on this experience, **John Boney, Vernon E. Norris Faculty Fellow in Poultry Nutrition and a member of Penn State Extension's Poultry Team**, emphasized the ongoing importance of proactive planning and collaboration in safeguarding the state's poultry resources.

“Our work complements that of the Pennsylvania Animal Diagnostic Laboratory System in protecting animal health and keeping Pennsylvania agriculture strong,” **Boney** said. “At Penn State, we're working every day to stay ahead of disease threats — not just by

improving how quickly we can detect them, but by helping producers prevent them in the first place. Through the College of Agricultural Sciences and Penn State Extension, we're leading efforts in biosecurity education, 'just in time' producer trainings, disease monitoring and preparedness planning. It's about giving producers the knowledge and resources they need to protect their flocks, their livelihoods and our state's food supply."

Wild birds are known to carry the virus. With fall wild bird migration underway, the risk of infection is at its peak and windy conditions heighten risks. Hamberg strongly urged producers to take advantage of free [Wildlife Biosecurity Assessments from the USDA](#) to help them identify and reduce risks on their farm.

Hamberg and Graybeal also encouraged farmers to apply for [HPAI Recovery Grants](#), which are helping farms and other poultry businesses get back on their feet after devastating losses from avian influenza. So far, 292 applicants have received a total of nearly \$15.7 million to help them recover losses and protect their operations with biosecurity improvements.

Pennsylvania's last three budgets each set aside \$25 million for the HPAI Recovery Fund which pays for the grants. The fund has \$59.6 million in reserve. **Governor Shapiro** has proposed a continued investment of \$11 million in the 2025-26 budget to add to the funds in reserve.

"As a leader, Pennsylvania has set a gold standard for animal disease response. The investments made by both Governor Wolf's and Shapiro's administrations, and by the Pennsylvania legislature, are unprecedented", said **Executive Vice President of PennAg Industries Chris Herr**. "As one of the states on the eastern seaboard with more poultry than cows, we are well-positioned to support farmers during this critical time. Our Department of Agriculture and state laboratories offer testing services and resources, including the HPAI Recovery Grant, to help address the challenges of Avian Influenza facing our poultry farmers."

Nationwide, [according to the USDA](#), there are 30 commercial flocks and 34 backyard flocks infected, with 3.57 million birds affected as of October 27, 2025.

While there is no risk to the general public, and poultry products and eggs are safe to eat if cooked properly, HPAI is highly infectious and is generally fatal to domestic birds.

"We have seen firsthand how the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has helping PA Poultry Growers both mitigate the spread of HPAI as well as support growers that have gone through the challenge of an outbreak", said **Martz's Gap View Hunting Preserve Owner Michael Martz**. "As a grower who has experienced an HPAI outbreak, we will be forever grateful for the empathy and support that was shown to us by this agency in order to help us get back to business in a timely and safe manner."

While there have been human infections of HPAI in other states, mainly in workers in close contact with infected poultry and dairy cattle, according to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), avian influenza presents very low risk to human health. Those who work closely with birds should wear appropriate personal protective gear as part of their farm's biosecurity efforts.

Anyone who encounters a sick or dead wild bird is asked to report it to the **PA Game Commission** at 1-833-PGC-WILD (1-833-742-9453).

Farmers should closely monitor bird health and report any unexplained illnesses and deaths in a flock to 717-772-2852.

Find more information about [avian influenza](#) and protecting your flock at [agriculture.pa.gov](#).

Read more about investments to keep Pennsylvania agriculture competitive and thriving in **Governor Shapiro's** 2025-26 budget proposal and support for Pennsylvania farmers at [pa.gov/governor](#).

Learn how **Governor Josh Shapiro's** [Economic Development Strategy](#) recognizes agriculture as key to our future economic success.

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