

Pass for poultry industry

Benedict Collins

WHILE avian influenza is rapidly spreading throughout the world and infecting new flocks experts say New Zealand's poultry industry biosecurity is simply superb.

Biosecurity NZ surveillance and incursion response adviser Dorothy Geale says the standard of the biosecurity measures in place in New Zealand is extremely high.

Ministry of Health, Biosecurity NZ and industry representatives recently toured a selection of poultry farms as part of what they describe as the country's holistic approach to avian influenza planning.

"For those of us who are not hands-on farmers we were not aware of the really good biosecurity measures in place," says Geale, "They [poultry] are under far more stringent biosecurity standards than humans are in terms of cleanliness."

The tour group had to shower before entering breeder barns and encouragingly Geale says there is virtually no poultry being transferred between farms here.

"The trip also gave us an idea of the differences, in terms of biosecurity, between birds farmed inside compared to free range as well as the different priorities of different sectors," she says.

While the chances of avian influenza arriving via the poultry industry Tuesday, 21 February 2006, p. 10

"are remote we still have to be prepared".

If it did arrive it is far more likely to come via humans, she says – "we can keep animal products out but humans are a bit harder".



Biosecurity NZ says the New Zealand poultry industry has a high standard of readiness for avian influenza.

New Zealand compares favourably internationally in terms of avian influenza planning because of its "integrated approach".

Poultry Industry Association executive director Michael Brooks was not

surprised by the findings, saying New Zealand is renowned for the "high level of biosecurity practiced at commercial farm level".

"Many other countries have high levels of biosecurity at breeder farm and hatchery operations but not at the commercial farm level," says Brooks.

"This level of biosecurity throughout our whole poultry industry structure is the key element in our unique major poultry disease free status."

Last week Europe and Africa reported their first cases of avian influenza a virus that can have a 100% mortality rate.

Brooks says the spread is a result of those regions being on the migratory flight paths of birds carrying the disease from Asia.

"The migratory birds that come to New Zealand are not on the same flight path, coming from the same areas or crossing the same areas, as the migratory birds causing the problems in Europe and Africa."

However, the spread of avian influenza to new areas is a powerful reminder of the need

for the industry to remain vigilant, Brooks says.

In the last two years MAF has conducted regular testing of migratory birds and all tests have so far proved negative.