

## **Free-range farming and avian flu in Asia December 2004**

Backyard farming systems are not solely responsible for the outbreak and spread of avian influenza in Asia. There are a great many factors that contributed to this including live bird markets, farm to farm transmission from contaminated equipment and even the smuggling of cockfighting birds across borders. However, the most significant reasons the outbreak in Asia has been so severe and widespread is because the majority of the countries in this region do not have adequate disease surveillance systems in place, or the resources to introduce recommended emergency disease control measures.

Reported claims that the World Health Organisation are recommending Asian governments intensify their poultry industry fail to take into account the catalogue of other public health concerns associated with industrial animal agriculture such as BSE, its human form vCJD and Nipah virus. These concerns are so great that the American Public Health Association (APHA) is 'urging federal, state and local governments and public health agencies to impose a moratorium on Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) until additional scientific data on the attendant risks to public health have been collected and uncertainties resolved.'

The Public Health Authority of America which has excellent surveillance and disease control measures in place feel that the risks posed to human health are so great that they were urging for a moratorium on the development of new systems until more research has been carried out. With this in mind, the recent WHO request to Asian country governments, such as Thailand, to intensify their industry seems ludicrous. Especially as the World Health Organization acknowledge on their website that these countries do not have the resources or capabilities to deal with the problems arising from factory farming.

Based on historical patterns, influenza pandemics can be expected to occur, on average, three to four times each century. It is with this in mind, WSPA urges countries to develop their own detailed contingency plan for dealing with an outbreak and seek expert advice on humane culling methods from WSPA or the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).