



Research Summary: Backyard Poultry in Alberta

Backyard poultry-keeping as a hobby, small business, and/or source of food has become increasingly popular within Canada. However, little is known about the demographics or disease awareness of this population in Alberta. For this study, a “Backyard Poultry Flock” is defined as a flock with less than the provincially enforced quota exemption levels. These non-commercial, non-quota flocks are permitted to keep up to 300 laying hens at any given time, and/or up to 300 turkeys per year, and/or up to 2000 broiler/meat birds per year.

About the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the size, geographical distribution, and management practices of the Alberta backyard poultry population, and discover factors that may be associated with Infectious Laryngotracheitis (ILT) infections in backyard flocks in this province.

Methods

An online survey called the “Alberta Backyard Poultry Health Survey” was developed and distributed between October 1, 2019 and March 31, 2020 on popular poultry, rural community, and farm-related Facebook pages specific to the province of Alberta.



Preliminary Findings

There were 298 responses from a combination of 57 counties and 10 cities within Alberta.

The primary poultry keepers in each respondent's household were overwhelmingly female, were most often persons between the ages of 35-49 years and had completed a post secondary level of education.

A clear majority of survey respondents (97.3%) reported that they kept poultry for **egg production** purposes. Approximately 90% of respondents with laying flocks reported owning 50 birds or less.

Almost half of the survey respondents reported that they raised birds for **meat production** (this may be in addition to their egg laying birds). Approximately 87% of respondents that kept meat birds reported raising 50 birds or less per year for this purpose.

Almost three quarters (73.2%) of the survey respondents reported that they have a Government of Alberta "Premises Identification (PID) Number". This would suggest that the provincial government is unaware of and has no way of reporting disease outbreaks to approximately 25% of the backyard flock-keepers that responded to this survey.

More than half of the survey respondents had been keeping backyard poultry for less than 5 years, and almost 20% had started a new flock within the last year. This indicates that Alberta has a relatively new and inexperienced population of backyard poultry keepers.

Only 2.3% of respondents reported that they had experienced an ILT infection in their flock at some point in time.

Future Direction

The results of this survey, along with data from Alberta Agriculture's PID Program and Non-Quota/Non-Commercial Poultry Flock Surveillance Program, will be used to help describe, locate (regionally), and quantify the Alberta backyard poultry population as well as to aid in the discovery of factors that may be associated with ILT infections within this population. This information can be used to develop and distribute programs and educational materials that can improve the health and welfare of backyard flocks while simultaneously protecting the commercial poultry population in Alberta.

About the Researchers



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