

These days it seems fashionable to suggest government is a burden, and that government agencies are essentially ineffective. Some parts of our government don't always seem to work very well. But I'd like to point out an instance where the timely response and coordination of state government personnel has safeguarded a sector that is critical to Indiana's economy and, in so doing, is protecting our citizens.

The impact of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) is probably not well appreciated by people who are not directly involved with the poultry industry in our state. The bird flu Type A viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds like ducks and geese worldwide, although they usually do not get sick. These birds migrate great distances and can spread that infection to domestic poultry with devastating results. In chickens, turkeys and other domestic birds, the virus lives up to its name--“highly pathogenic”--with a vengeance! In mid-December of 2014, the first confirmed detection was reported for the current outbreak, and, to date, more than 40 million birds have been affected nationwide. The loss of so many animals has already been reflected in an increased price of eggs and poultry products. Probably most Hoosiers don't realize that our state is the national leader in commercial duck production and ranks second in egg-type hatch, third in production of chicken layers and fourth in turkey production. In short, the poultry industry is a very big deal for the economics of Indiana's agricultural output.

We are fortunate to have skilled veterinarians of the State Board of Animal Health (BOAH) spearheading the effort to prevent the flu outbreak from devastating our poultry economy. Working closely with other State Agency professionals in the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Health, BOAH field personnel have worked tirelessly to contain the one confirmed outbreak of this disease in a central Indiana flock. Veterinarians from BOAH and local veterinarians have been diligent in sampling, inspecting and quarantining movement of poultry with outstanding results to date. Our state Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratories (ADDL), part of the Purdue University College of Veterinary Medicine, has implemented rapid turn-around testing of samples to further aid field workers in containing the disease. Finally, since the county and state fair season is upon us, folks will notice the absence of poultry at those events, a direct result of the necessary measures to protect our livestock from the epidemic.

And, this isn't just about poultry! Flu viruses are constantly changing and animal flu viruses can gain an ability to infect people easily. While the H5 strains in circulation this year are not a threat to humans, this has occurred in the past. The most dramatic was the 1918 flu pandemic, which resulted in an estimated 50-100 million human deaths worldwide. More recently, the strain of flu known as Asian H5N1 has been reported to have caused up to 18,500 human deaths worldwide since its emergence in 2003. Readers will likely remember the outbreak of a pig flu strain at several fairs in 2012 and the resulting efforts by the BOAH to contain another yet flu strain that had the ability to infect humans. Then, like now, timely responses by the appropriate agency professionals are the safeguards we count

on to maintain surveillance and alert us to protective actions we need to minimize the impact of any potential epidemics.

I ask readers to appreciate this work that these and other veterinarians, as well as individuals from other professions, do to protect all of us and keep us safe from disease. Ensure your state legislators know that those agencies and the diagnostic laboratories are essential and in need of their support. Especially in the midst of this crisis, these agencies prove their immense value to Hoosiers, efficiently and rigorously working to control the animal, human and economic devastation of a terrible disease. Ensuring continued funding to equip them to do their good work, and to have the technology they will need to combat this and future disease threats, is entirely in keeping with the idea that government should be in the business of “promoting the general welfare” of o