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Dear Members of Maine's Dairy Community:

You've likely heard that the USDA recently announced a new National Milk Testing Strategy, requiring the testing of Grade A unpasteurized milk to track the spread of highly pathogenic avian influenza (H5N1). The USDA announcement (in the form of a Federal Order dated December 6, 2024) has raised questions about how we at Maine DACF will implement this directive. (Links to the Federal Order and other information about USDA's H5N1 response can be found [here](#).) We don't yet have all the information we need from USDA to answer this question fully, but we do want to share what we know now:

1. The National Milk Testing Strategy is intended to tell us more about how the virus spreads and to more quickly identify which states and herds have H5N1 outbreaks. The Strategy will support the rapid implementation of enhanced biosecurity measures to decrease the risk of transmission to other livestock and inform efforts to limit exposure to farm workers.
2. Maine has begun working with USDA on plans for sampling silos at processing facilities and bulk tanks at farms. We will seek input from the dairy community and share those plans before they launch. As of today, we don't have dates for when either silo sampling or bulk tank testing will begin.
3. Per the Federal Order, farms whose herds test positive for H5N1 will be required to provide epidemiological data for contact tracing and disease surveillance. Private labs and state veterinarians must also report positive samples to the USDA.
4. The Strategy is the next step in USDA's efforts to track and study H5N1. In April 2024, the USDA issued a Federal Order requiring the mandatory testing of lactating dairy cows before interstate shipment and required private laboratories and state veterinarians to report positive test results connected with those tests.

Here are some steps we at DACF's Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources are taking to prepare to implement the USDA's Mandatory National Milk Testing Strategy:

1. Since December 6, discussions have been ongoing within DACF and with USDA and other key stakeholders to determine the timing, scope, activities, and responsibilities across the multiphase USDA strategy.
2. DACF staff have closely assessed the latest Federal Order outlining the Strategy. We continue to participate in Q&A sessions and webinars to ensure we have a complete understanding of what the Order is asking of DACF, Maine dairy farmers, and the rest of our dairy industry.

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3. We have begun drafting Maine's plan for USDA review and approval for silo testing and any required bulk tank monitoring. We will seek input from partners as we proceed.
4. We encourage interested stakeholders to subscribe to GovDelivery updates using [this form](#) and, when prompted, selecting the lists "Avian Influenza" and "Dairy Cattle." We will use these channels to share new details as they become available. In addition, National Milk Testing Strategy resources are being added to the DACF Dairy Cattle & HPAI webpage and will be updated as needed, which can be found [here](#).

As a reminder, H5N1 was first detected in U.S. dairy herds in March 2024 and has been found in 720 dairy herds throughout 15 states. H5N1 has had and continues to have a significant impact on the poultry industry. While the risk to the public remains low, nearly 60 people across the country have been confirmed to have contracted H5N1 this year. None of the impacted herds or people have been in the Northeast.

Don't hesitate to reach out if you'd like to speak with DACF staff. You can contact me at [craig.lapine@maine.gov](mailto:craig.lapine@maine.gov) or (207) 557-1623. For questions about H5N1 in livestock, contact our Animal Health program at [animalhealth.agr@maine.gov](mailto:animalhealth.agr@maine.gov) or (207) 287-3701. For questions about sampling, contact the Director of the Maine Milk Lab at (207) 287-7623 or [linda.stahlnecker@maine.gov](mailto:linda.stahlnecker@maine.gov).

Sincerely,



Craig Lapine  
Bureau Director