

At last.....our birds are vaccinated against Avian Influenza

Our 23 geese and 4 chickens are vaccinated....at last.

Well it could have been done sooner but we wanted the goslings to be vaccinated as well. As we had permission from the EU to vaccinated until the first of July we could wait until our goslings were old enough. They had to be 7 weeks of age before they were allowed to be vaccinated. Friday June 9th Sible Westendorp, the veterinarian and chairman of the NWPP (Dutch workforce for poultry and waterfowl) came over. It would save us double costs if we would vaccinate them all at the same time so therefore we waited until June. Early this year we had decided not to breed this year but a family who had ordered two geese last year were very disappointed they had to wait another year. As things were so insecure, due to the AI treat, we thought it would be better not to breed this year. Then we got another phone call from people who wanted two geese, and vaccinated birds, so we decided to breed just a few goslings. We also told those people who had ordered last year that we would breed with our geese but that we would vaccinate the goslings also. That meant that they had to be registered by our ministry of agriculture too if they still wanted geese from us. They agreed.

I've been waiting and fighting for three years for this moment, since the outbreak of Avian Influenza H7N7 back in 2003, but that Friday morning I was very nervous. Had I made the right decision?, How would the birds react on the vaccin?, Could I get the vet that far that he wouldn't put on those awful metal leg bands? And more of that.

It almost gave me a stomach ache....

Unfortunately for me Sible didn't dare not to put on the metal leg bands...He couldn't make it he said. He didn't like them either but we had no choice at this moment he told me.

As we were with four persons it was done in less than an hour. Peter, my husband, made some pictures and Marieke and myself picked up the birds. As we had shut them up in their night houses they were easy to pick up. They are also very tame and used of picking up. Bernadette, Marieke her mother made sure no other one would get out and closed the door behind us when we got one out. First we took the chickens and Sible had to take some blood samples. As some friends had scared me that it would become a bloody mess when they take the blood samples from the geese I asked Sible if it was ok to take the blood samples from the chickens. "The customer may choose", he said with a big smile so he took from two chickens a blood sample. The minimum was 5% of the complete flock but at least 2 birds. Normally they just cut a vein in the wing but as Sible saw my face he asked: "Shall I try it with an injection needle?" "Please do". I told him. It didn't go as I had hoped for because the chickens got scared and moved while he tried to get the needle into the vein so they started bleeding. He did get enough blood although.

I really was glad we hadn't done that with the geese...

After the blood samples were taken the birds received their metal leg band. Vaccination AI 2006NL (NL = The Netherlands) it says on that leg band. After that they got the injection in the breast muscle. They didn't give a single kick. After that we took the geese, first the leg band and then the injection. Not a single one did difficult, not even the goslings.

After Sible had finished the vaccination he had to fill in the forms. That took most of the time and as he said: "It's unbelievable that we have to do this like this in this century of modern technologies. It had to be done with a pencil... Not just print the forms. As it is a pilot project it takes time I suppose. Same as those awful leg bands. Poor birds. Now they have on each leg a leg band and the metal one is quite heavy. They already had a plastic leg band with an unique number on it....

Really, we are very curious how they will do that next year. Suppose we have the opportunity to vaccinate again next year than they need another leg band with 2007 on it. These metal leg bands are very difficult to remove, better say they can't be removed or you have to be with three people. One to pick up the bird, another one to keep the leg still and the third one who has to remove the leg band with special equipment. I can't imagine our government wants to build up the complete leg with leg bands. I really do believe the people who work at our ministry of agriculture have never seen a geese or chicken alive otherwise they wouldn't have agreed on such awfull leg bands. I also wonder if they have ever seen such a leg band at our ministry... Maybe some vet of the Animal Health Commission has come up with them. Oh... they are just birds they must have thought. Animal welfare is very far away.... If they really had no other choice with those metal leg bands they should have given them also an unique number so they wouldn't have to be replaced if we would get permission from the EU to continue the vaccination program. Or... better had listen to the NWPP who had different suggestions for identification. If you know that the EU never has said they have to have those leg bands and that it was a decision of our own ministry you do wonder... The reason they need to be identified is only for our AID (Animal Health Inspection) so that those inspectors can see from a distance which birds are vaccinated or not during a period of confining. Vaccinated birds no longer have to be confined. Suppose our birds are in their pools when they come over and we're not at home. No one can see if they wear a metal leg band... As Sible said: we live in a century of modern technologies, so why don't they have a laptop with them with all the information on it. Just fill in an address and they will know if the birds are vaccinated or not. Or don't they trust us? Would we buy new birds who aren't vaccinated and might not be confined.... That may also be a reason...

Well I do hope all of the world will get the opportunity to protect their birds against Avian Influenza H5N1 like us and France, as we don't get rid of it for the next 50 years experts say. Right now, a day later I'm very glad we have vaccinated our birds. Nor only to protect them against this nasty virus but also that we don't have to confine them again next autumn (and maybe all winter). I really think it's the keeper his/her own responsibility to vaccinate or not and that we should have the choice. Not needing permission from our governments!

Our geese are fine, not a single vaccination reactions and doing as usual. They only thing that is different is if they hit something with their metal leg band it goes like....cling cling.... It took us a few hours before we knew where that sound came from.... June 30th they will get their second injection so they will be protected for a year against H5N1. Then between nine weeks after the second vaccination and a year some more blood samples have to be taken. They want to have a lot of these test results so our ministry, and probably also the EU, has the chance to get more information about vaccinating birds against Avian Influenza.... We are a pilot program, same as France, but if it will help to get all the birds and humans protected against H5N1 I don't mind.

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