

## MID-MICHIGAN

# Birds banned from 4-H fairs

## Avian flu outbreak prompts state action

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**By Adrian Hedden**

*Special to The Morning Sun*

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Cheryl Kinberg will have to wait until next year for her family's chickens to be displayed publicly.

But by then, the 18-year-old 4-H senior ambassador at Clare High School will be long graduated.

Her four younger siblings will present the birds next summer at 4-H competitions, one year after all poultry and waterfowl were banned from public exhibitions statewide.

"It's kind of sad for my last year, I don't get to be with my chickens," Kinberg said. "I like sharing my chickens. You bond with them. My siblings will definitely be back next year."

Specializing in poultry and rabbits, Kinberg said she spends about two hours per day caring for her chickens. She owns seven of multiple breeds, but this year will have to leave them in the coop.

"You get a trust and friendship," Kinberg said of caring for the birds. "I'm a loner, but I love my animals."

All poultry and waterfowl exhibitions were canceled June 1 by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development because of a national outbreak of avian flu viruses.

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# Birds

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Despite no cases of the viruses reported in Michigan as of June 1, MDARD placed sanctions on the birds to prevent them from commingling with infected birds from out of state.

The ban will last throughout the summer fair season.

"We know the tremendous amount of time, money and passion the kids and other exhibitors invest into their birds and the importance of having livestock animals at these events to interact with the public," said MDARD's state veterinarian James Averill in a statement. "The rapid spread of these avian flu viruses is historic and has impacted more than a dozen states across the U.S.

"While there are currently no known cases of HPAI in Michigan, commitment to protecting the health of all of the state's poultry flocks - backyard and commercial farmers - led us to making this difficult decision."

In January, the Centers for Disease Control reported the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses in birds from multiple states, after increased outreach and observation detected viruses in commercial Canadian flocks.

According to the CDC, there is low risk for human infections, but people have



ADRIAN HEDDEN — SPECIAL TO THE MORNING SUN

Cheryl Kinberg, 18, holds one of her seven chickens that would have been displayed in a 4-H competition this summer if not for a statewide ban on public displays of birds, at her home in Clare.

been affected in the past by similar strains.

The viruses are contagious between birds, and as a general precaution, people are advised to avoid wild birds, read a CDC news release.

The fallout of the ban was felt at 4-H clubs across Michigan, planning bird and poultry exhibition this summer.

Katie Ockhert, 4-H animal science educator at the Michigan State University Extension in Alma, said

her organization has been working to come up with creative solutions to educate students without the presence of live birds.

"This absolutely has an effect on 4-H programs across Michigan," Ockhert said. "Many groups display birds and this has changed things. We've come up with creative solutions as our purpose is education."

Alternatives to displaying poultry and waterfowl at competitions included informational posters,

and lifelike models to replace the live birds. Ockhert said one-on-one interviews could be set up so students can display their content knowledge to judges.

"In terms of the actual show, we are asking some groups to purchase lifelike models so they can do the showmanship show," she said. "Anytime we're involved in agriculture, there is some risk. This is one of those times. We need to take these lemons and

make lemonade."

For the Kinbergs, missing out on displaying their chickens was disappointing, but Cheryl's father David, a 4-H leader in Clare for 23 years, said this year will focus more on education.

"It's kind of a disappointment, but the kids will learn to make the best of the situation," he said. "They'll get through it working on other presentations. It'll be more the educational side of things."