

Press Release

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Newly elected Chairman of Copa & Cogeca Poultry and Eggs Working Party steps up pressure to support EU poultry producers hit hard by impact of bird flu

Newly elected poultry farmer Charles Bourns Chairman of Copa & Cogecas' Poultry and Eggs Working Party stepped up pressure today to call for support for EU poultry producers who have been suffering from the impact of bird flu on their flocks, saying a quick solution to the problem must be found.

Speaking after the election in Brussels, Chairman of Copa & Cogecas Poultry and Eggs Working Party Charles Bourns, a poultry producer, said, "Our poultry producers who have invested heavily in their free range units have been hit badly by the impact of bird flu on their flocks. A priority for me during my 2 year mandate will be to resolve this problem both now and for future outbreaks. Flexibility must be introduced into current EU rules to allow for such epidemics. Poultry and egg prices are below the five year average and 2017 is likely to be a difficult year due to bird flu and a cut in exports to our Japanese market if action is not taken".

He pointed out that the H5N8 strain of bird flu, caused by the migration of wild birds, has resulted in over 80% of free range laying hens to be kept indoors to avoid infection. This strategy has been successful. But current rules state that eggs from laying flocks kept indoors beyond a 12-week threshold to be downgraded from *free range* to *barn*, causing very few *free range* eggs to be available to consumers in the EU in the months ahead. Together with our organisations in the food chain, Copa & Cogeca have urged the European Commission to issue a derogation to allow *free range* flocks, that remain housed after 12 weeks because of the present bird flu problem, to be able to maintain their *free range* status for a slightly longer period as farmers who have invested heavily in *free range* facilities will otherwise suffer enormously. But so far the Commission has rejected our calls and we are keen to continue working with them to find a solution. We urge the Commission to act quickly to the benefit of both consumers and farmers.

In addition, we call on the Commission to negotiate with non-EU countries that currently do not recognise the EU principle of regionalisation, as agreed by the World Animal Health Organisation OIE, and ensure that bans are imposed only in the regions where the outbreaks have occurred. Unilateral bans are not acceptable. This is particularly important given the positive prospects in the sector with poultry consumption expected to rise by 1.7% in 2017, albeit at a slower pace than in 2016, he added.

He went on to outline the difficult situation facing EU rabbit producers and urged the EU support the sector "Production and consumption is expected to decline again in 2017 yet rabbit meat provides consumers with a good source of protein in their diet. We have some of the highest production standards in the world in this sector and believe it is better to enforce current rules than introduce alternative options which have not been backed up by science and which would hit the sector even harder. We must keep production in the EU", he stressed.

Mr Bourns is from the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales and is an experienced poultry producer. He will be supported by two Vice-Chairman Mr Jean-Michel Schaeffer from France and Ms Anna Zubkow from Poland.

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