

# Global Poultry Industry is the Root of the Bird Flu Crisis

By [Global Research](#)

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*A new and extremely important report has come out today from GRAIN, about the mistaken policy analysis and debate surrounding the current Bird Flu crisis.*

While panic in the media and at government levels is focused on the threat from migratory birds and small-scale free-range poultry operations, the real reason for the development and spread of the disease has been quietly ignored.

The GRAIN report shows that emergence of bird flu follows the global poultry industry's movements - and NOT migratory bird movements. The large-scale, confined, and frankly disgusting, factory farming conditions that characterise the global poultry industry are likely to be the real cause of the mutation of bird flu into its deadly form. *The widespread movements of the industry's chickens and hatching eggs, are likely to be the cause of its spread.*

## 1. Report Says Global Poultry Industry is the Root of the Bird Flu Crisis

Press Release from GRAIN. **Date: 27 February 2006**

**<http://www.grain.org/nfg/?id=372>**

Small-scale poultry farming and wild birds are being unfairly blamed for the bird flu crisis now affecting large parts of the world. A new report from GRAIN shows how the transnational poultry industry is the root of the problem and must be the focus of efforts to control the virus.[1]

The spread of industrial poultry production and trade networks has created ideal conditions for the emergence and transmission of lethal viruses like the H5N1 strain of bird flu. Once inside densely populated factory farms, viruses can rapidly become lethal and amplify. Air thick with viral load from infected farms is carried for kilometres, while integrated trade networks spread the disease through many carriers: live birds, day-old-chicks, meat, feathers, hatching eggs, eggs, chicken manure and animal feed.[2]

"Everyone is focused on migratory birds and backyard chickens as the problem," says Devlin Kuyek of GRAIN. "But they are not effective vectors of highly pathogenic bird flu. The virus kills them, but is unlikely to be spread by them."

For example, in Malaysia, the mortality rate from H5N1 among village chicken is only 5%, indicating that the virus has a hard time spreading among small scale chicken flocks. H5N1 outbreaks in Laos, which is surrounded by infected countries, have only occurred in the

nation's few factory farms, which are supplied by Thai hatcheries. The only cases of bird flu in backyard poultry, which account for over 90% of Laos' production, occurred next to the factory farms.

"The evidence we see over and over again, from the Netherlands in 2003 to Japan in 2004 to Egypt in 2006, is that lethal bird flu breaks out in large scale industrial chicken farms and then spreads," Kuyek explains.

The Nigerian outbreak earlier this year began at a single factory farm, owned by a Cabinet minister, distant from hotspots for migratory birds but known for importing unregulated hatchable eggs. In India, local authorities say that H5N1 emerged and spread from a factory farm owned by the country's largest poultry company, Venkateshwara Hatcheries.

A burning question is why governments and international agencies, like the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, are doing nothing to investigate how the factory farms and their byproducts, such as animal feed and manure, spread the virus. Instead, they are using the crisis as an opportunity to further industrialise the poultry sector. Initiatives are multiplying to ban outdoor poultry, squeeze out small producers and restock farms with genetically-modified chickens. The web of complicity with an industry engaged in a string of denials and cover-ups seems complete.

"Farmers are losing their livelihoods, native chickens are being wiped out and some experts say that we're on the verge of a human pandemic that could kill millions of people," Kuyek concludes. "When will governments realise that to protect poultry and people from bird flu, we need to protect them from the global poultry industry?"

[1] The full briefing, "Fowl play: The poultry industry's central role in the bird flu crisis", is available at <http://www.grain.org>. Spanish and French translations will be posted shortly.

[2] Chicken faeces and bedding from poultry factory floors are common ingredients in animal feed.

GRAIN is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) which promotes the sustainable management and use of agricultural biodiversity based on people's control over genetic resources and local knowledge.

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## **2. Report Blames Flu on Industrial Poultry Farms Not Backyard Birds**

Article from Environmental News Service. Date: 27 February 2006

<http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/feb2006/2006-02-27-01.asp>

BARCELONA, Spain, February 27, 2006 (ENS) – Small-scale poultry farming and wild birds are being unfairly blamed for the bird flu crisis now affecting large parts of the world, according to a new report from an international nongovernmental organization based in Barcelona. The report says initiatives are multiplying to ban outdoor poultry, squeeze out

small producers and restock farms with genetically modified chickens.

Instead, the transnational poultry industry is the root of the bird flu problem, says the report issued today by the organization GRAIN, which promotes the sustainable management and use of agricultural biodiversity based on people's control over genetic resources and local knowledge.

"Everyone is focused on migratory birds and backyard chickens as the problem," says Devlin Kuyek of GRAIN. "But they are not effective vectors of highly pathogenic bird flu. The virus kills them, but is unlikely to be spread by them."

Kuyek says the spread of industrial poultry production and trade networks have created ideal conditions for the emergence and transmission of the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain of bird flu.

Once inside densely populated factory farms, viruses can rapidly become lethal and amplify, says Kuyek. "Air thick with viral load from infected farms is carried for kilometers, while integrated trade networks spread the disease through many carriers: live birds, day-old-chicks, meat, feathers, hatching eggs, eggs, chicken manure and animal feed." Chicken feces and bedding from poultry factory floors are common ingredients in animal feed.

By contrast, GRAIN argues that backyard poultry farms watch their birds closely and know when they are sick, but a sick bird or two amongst thousands in industrial poultry operations are much more difficult to detect.

Not an idle pastime for landowners, backyard poultry raising is crucial to food security and farming income for hundreds of millions of rural poor in Asia and elsewhere, providing a third of the protein intake for the average rural household, the GRAIN report states.

Although wild birds can become ill with H5N1 bird flu, BirdLife International says if wild birds have any role in spreading the virus, it is minor compared to other mechanisms.

BirdLife, a global partnership of conservation organizations in more than 100 countries, says, "All the evidence suggests that H5N1 is highly lethal to migratory wild bird species, and kills them quickly; that infected migrants cannot move long distances; and that the virus is most likely to be contracted locally, close to the site of deaths."

"The current focus on migrating wild birds is misplaced and a potentially dangerous diversion of energy, effort and resources. Attempts to cull wild birds are even more misguided - the target is wrong and the approach is completely ineffective," BirdLife says.

Preventive measures need to concentrate on better bio-security, says BirdLife - surveillance and testing of poultry, controlling the movements and sale of poultry, poultry products and caged birds, ensuring that all poultry manure used in aquaculture and agriculture is properly treated prior to application, and stepping up national and international efforts to control the illegal trade in poultry, poultry products and wild birds.

Nearly all rural households in Asia keep at least a few chickens for meat, eggs and fertilizer and they are often the only livestock that poor farmers can afford.

GRAIN says backyard birds are critical to diversified farming methods, just as the genetic

diversity of poultry on small farms is critical to the long-term survival of poultry farming in general.

Before the Asian bird flu crisis, the GRAIN report points out, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization promoted the benefits of backyard poultry for the rural poor and biodiversity and ran programs encouraging it.

But today, with the H5N1 strain at the gates of Western Europe, it is more common to hear the FAO speak of the risks of backyard farming.

The GRAIN report notes that in Malaysia, the mortality rate from H5N1 among village chicken is only five percent, indicating that the virus has a hard time spreading among small scale chicken flocks.

H5N1 outbreaks in Laos, which is surrounded by infected countries, have only occurred in the nation's few factory farms, which are supplied by Thai hatcheries. The only cases of bird flu in backyard poultry, which account for over 90 percent of Laos' production, occurred next to the factory farms.

"The evidence we see over and over again, from the Netherlands in 2003 to Japan in 2004 to Egypt in 2006, is that lethal bird flu breaks out in large scale industrial chicken farms and then spreads," Kuyek says.

The Nigerian outbreak earlier this year began at a single factory farm, owned by a Cabinet minister, distant from hotspots for migratory birds but known for importing unregulated hatchable eggs.

In India, local authorities say that H5N1 emerged and spread from a factory farm owned by the country's largest poultry company, Venkateshwara Hatcheries.

"A burning question is why governments and international agencies, like the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), are doing nothing to investigate how the factory farms and their byproducts, such as animal feed and manure, spread the virus," says Kuyek.

Instead, he says, they are using the bird flu crisis as an opportunity to further industrialize the poultry sector.

Bans on outdoor poultry have been imposed at certain times or in specified locations in - Austria, Canada, China, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, and Vietnam.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said as early as March 2004 that backyard poultry production might pose difficulties in controlling the spread of the H5N1 viral strain of bird flu.

In several countries experiencing outbreaks, up to 80 percent of poultry are produced on small farms and backyard holdings in rural areas, where poultry range freely, said WHO. In China, 60 percent of the country's estimated 13.2 billion chickens are raised on small farms in close proximity to humans and domestic animals, including pigs.

"This situation makes implementation of strict control measures, essential to the control of previous outbreaks, extremely difficult," WHO said. "These control measures - including

bird-proof, ecologically controlled housing, treatment of water supplies, disinfection of all incoming persons, equipment, and vehicles, prevention of contact with insects, rodents, and other mechanical vectors – cannot be applied on small rural farms and backyard holdings.”

In a Fact Sheet issued this month, WHO explained why H5N1 outbreaks in backyard poultry flocks are of concern.

“Apart from being difficult to control, outbreaks in backyard flocks are associated with a heightened risk of human exposure and infection,” WHO said. “These birds usually roam freely as they scavenge for food and often mingle with wild birds or share water sources with them. Such situations create abundant opportunities for human exposure to the virus, especially when birds enter households or are brought into households during adverse weather, or when they share areas where children play or sleep.”

“Poverty exacerbates the problem,” WHO explains because when even a single chicken cannot be wasted, people eat poultry when deaths or signs of illness appear in flocks.

This practice carries a high risk of exposure to the virus during slaughtering, defeathering, butchering, and preparation of poultry meat for cooking, but has proved difficult to change, says the international health organization.

Because deaths of birds in backyard flocks are common, especially under adverse weather conditions, owners may not interpret deaths or signs of illness in a flock as a signal of avian influenza and a reason to alert the authorities, WHO has found.

“This tendency may help explain why outbreaks in some rural areas have smoldered undetected for months. The frequent absence of compensation to farmers for destroyed birds further works against the spontaneous reporting of outbreaks and may encourage owners to hide their birds during culling operations.”

GRAIN says the owners of backyard poultry flocks are being blamed unfairly. “Farmers are losing their livelihoods, native chickens are being wiped out and some experts say that we’re on the verge of a human pandemic that could kill millions of people,” Kuyek says. “When will governments realize that to protect poultry and people from bird flu, we need to protect them from the global poultry industry?”

The GRAIN report quotes Louise Fresco, assistant director-general of FAO as saying, “The backyard chicken is the big problem and the fight against bird flu must be waged in the backyard of the world’s poor.”

Kuyek calls this policy reversal, “a reckless mistake,” and asserts, “When it comes to bird flu, diverse small-scale poultry farming is the solution, not the problem.”

The report, “Fowl play: The poultry industry’s central role in the bird flu crisis,” is online at: <http://www.grain.org/go/birdflu>.

### **3. Factory Farms Behind Bird Flu Spread: Wild Birds Not Really to Blame**

Article from Bangkok Post. Date: 27 February 2006

Achara Ashayagachat

[http://www.bangkokpost.com/News/27Feb2006\\_news09.php](http://www.bangkokpost.com/News/27Feb2006_news09.php)

A new report released yesterday blamed the transnational poultry industry, and not small-scale poultry farming and wild birds, as the root cause of the global bird flu crisis.

The spread of industrial poultry production and trade networks has actually created ideal conditions for the emergence and transmission of lethal viruses like the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu, said Devlin Kuyek, of the Montreal-based international non-governmental organisation Grain.

Once inside densely populated factory farms, viruses can rapidly become lethal and amplify, said Mr Kuyek in the report released today.

Air thick with viral load from infected farms was carried for kilometres, while integrated trade networks spread the disease through many carriers: live birds, day-old chicks, meat, feathers, hatching eggs, eggs, chicken manure and animal feed, he added.

“Everyone is focused on migratory birds and backyard chickens as the problem,” said the researcher of Grain, which promotes the sustainable management and use of agricultural biodiversity based on people’s control over genetic resources and local knowledge.

“But they are not effective vectors of highly pathogenic bird flu. The virus kills them, but is unlikely to be spread by them,” he said.

For example, in Malaysia, the mortality rate from H5N1 among village chicken was only 5%, indicating that the virus had a hard time spreading among small-scale chicken flocks.

H5N1 outbreaks in Laos, which was surrounded by infected countries, have only occurred in the nation’s few factory farms, which were supplied by Thai hatcheries, the report said.

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