Farmers in bird flu 'panic' call for UK vaccine plan



Paul kelly file pic

Poultry farmers are appealing to the government to let them vaccinate their flocks against the "devastating" bird flu virus spreading across the UK

Farmers in bird flu 'panic' call for UK vaccine planPoultry farmers are appealing to the government to let them vaccinate their flocks against the "devastating" bird flu virus spreading across the UKFarmers in bird flu 'panic' call for UK vaccine plan

Paul Kelly A farmer with medium length white hair and a dark green quilted jacket stands in a portait. In the background but blurred out of focus are dozens of turkeys. They are among green grass and there's a type of domed green outhouse in the far distance.Paul Kelly

Paul Kelly, whose turkey business has previously been hit by bird flu, is among those calling for a vaccination scheme for poultry

Poultry farmers are appealing to the government to let them vaccinate their flocks against the "devastating" bird flu virus spreading across the UK.

Vaccinating poultry against avian influenza is currently not allowed in the UK. The government says that strong biosecurity measures and culling are the most effective ways of fighting it. Meanwhile, there are concerns that poultry vaccinations might be linked to the virus evolving.

Overall levels of the virus have not yet reached the peak of recent years.

But one farmer, who has previously lost 30% of his flock because of bird flu, told the BBC that, without a vaccine, it was only a matter of time before "it all kicks off A bird flu prevention zone enforcing strict hygiene standards around domesticated birds has been declared for England, Wales and Scotland amid a rising number of cases of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).

The risk to humans remains low, with chicken and eggs safe to eat if properly cooked, according to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra

Defra has set up a cross-government and poultry industry taskforce that is looking at the potential use of vaccines, and is due to publish its report later this year. But poultry farmers say things are moving too slowl

Essex turkey farmer Paul Kelly, whose business was hit hard in the worst avian flu outbreak from 2021 to 2023, told the BBC that "the foot has been taken off the gas" when it comes to making poultry vaccines available to UK farmer

"This is poor planning as we need to be ready for another huge outbreak as opposed to reacting to another outbreak and being behind the curve on rolling out vaccination," he sai

"Avian influenza is so highly pathogenic that if a farmer gets it [in his flock][it is devastating

There have so far been 25 farm outbreaks of bird flu since the annual winter recording season began in Octobe

In comparison, between October 2021 and January 2022, during the UK's worst outbreak, there had been more than 70 cases in poultry or other captive bird

But Gary Ford, of the British Free Range Egg Producers Association, said that there was still "panic, concern and fear out there" among farmers over the virus spreadings..).He added that the organisation was a "huge supporter" of vaccination for poultry but recognised there were challenges, including the cost to farmers and the impact on trade with other countries that prohibit imports from producers that vaccinate.

Meanwhile, there are also some scientific concerns about bird flu vaccinations

LENS ASIA