

A European foie gras sector proactive against the successive avian influenza outbreaks

Within the European Association of Foie Gras Producers, the five European countries producing foie gras - Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, France and Hungary - have regular exchanges on the situation in their respective country concerning avian influenza as well as on the legislative evolution and good practices put in place.

Aware that open-air, the fundamental characteristic of their breeding, requires increased vigilance, Euro Foie Gras is mobilized and proactive to prevent and cope with the emergence of new outbreaks. This position paper is a common base shared by Euro Foie Gras members who may be subject to stricter national rules.

The "outdoor" breeding method should remain the rule



Open-air is a fundamental characteristic of the breeding of foie gras palmipeds that spend **90% of their life in outdoor areas**. Breeders want to maintain this particularity, which contributes to the exceptional nature of their **breeding method**, and which responds to a **strong consumer demand** for quality poultry. Therefore, Euro Foie Gras argues that outdoor farming should remain the rule.

In cases of increased risk level during high-risk periods, breeders should be able to shelter their animals

Euro Foie Gras supports **the call for the construction of indoor housings as well as the use of any other means capable of avoiding contacts with the avifauna in case of increased risk level during high risk periods**. High risk periods correspond to wild bird migration phases. Risk levels are mainly defined according to avian influenza cases and the type of virus present in the avifauna of the country and its bordering countries. The periods and levels must be defined at the national level. Depending on national realities, the construction of buildings or any other means must be progressive and financial support from public authorities will certainly be necessary.

Reinforced biosecurity measures

The European Foie Gras sector has taken note of **EFSA's recommendations** on avian influenza, including **surveillance and biosecurity**¹. Most of these measures are already implemented in the Member States.

Euro Foie Gras defends the principle of a **waiting period for sanitary reasons** (“vide sanitaire”) which must be applied according to the breeding methods and under the responsibility of the Member States. The waiting period must be strengthened if the risk level increases during high risk periods.

Furthermore, European producers of foie gras share the opinion of EFSA's experts that avoiding direct and indirect contacts of palmipeds with wild birds reduces the risk of introducing the epizootic disease into farms. Therefore, Euro Foie Gras considers that breeders should have the ability to put the **feed and water points** of the palmipeds inside or to protect them from wild birds by any other means or by setting up specific systems such as nipple drinkers.

In addition, each production unit should be equipped with an adequately fitted **changing room** (“sas sanitaire”) in which a strict protocol must be applied.

Euro Foie Gras also stresses the importance of **securing animal movements between farms** through the adoption and application of various measures such as the cleaning and disinfection of vehicles and containers or the training of personnel in biosecurity measures.

With regard to the **access to the farm, it should be restricted** to the farmer as well as to any accredited person who is necessary for the proper monitoring of the farm such as veterinarians. Animated by a spirit of openness and transparency, the European breeders of foie gras wish to preserve the possibility of organizing farm visits. For educational reasons, the **maintenance of these visits is essential provided that they are properly supervised and organized** by applying adequate preventive health measures.

In addition, Euro Foie Gras calls for developing ways of **improving communication and information for farmers** about the epizootic situation. For example, in France, professionals in support of the administration have deployed a database listing all producers, their livestock buildings and animal movements. Associated with a cartographic tool, it is possible to quickly identify the farms located in the regulated zones, alerting the actors to stop any movement of animals and to avoid any propagation of the virus.

Finally, Euro Foie Gras insists on the **need for the training** of actors of the sector in biosecurity measures.

¹ <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2017.4991>

The discussion on the declaration of cases of low pathogenic avian influenza virus should be reopened

Euro Foie Gras calls on the European Commission to **reopen the debate, on a scientific base, regarding the issue of the mandatory declaration of low pathogenic avian influenza cases** to the World Organization for Animal Health. The European foie gras producing countries emphasize the importance of maintaining a satisfactory level of information of third countries as this helps maintain fundamental trust in commercial relations. On the other hand, they ask that the declaration of cases of low pathogenic avian influenza virus **does not lead to the closing of markets**. Indeed, the measures implemented in the regulated zones, the heavy investments in terms of cleaning, disinfection of the means of transport and breeding, as well as the strict identification of the farms in a database should make it possible to limit commercial restrictions to regulated areas. In other words, Euro Foie Gras advocates the recognition of the **compartmentalisation of animal diseases** and more particularly of avian influenza.

Euro Foie Gras, the European Foie Gras Association, brings together producers' federations from France, Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain and Hungary. Its goal is to establish a continuous exchange of good practices, know-how and promote the profession of foie gras producer.

April 2018