

Summary from AgriHealth's 2025 Poultry Health Seminar

AgriHealth recently held its tenth annual poultry health seminar. The day was attended by over 50 people who work in various roles within the New Zealand poultry industry. Nine speakers delivered 11 talks with two interactive panels answering a range of questions from the audience.



Seminar Attendees on the lawn at LaValla

Huvepharma's global product manager Wouter van der Veken travelled from Belgium to deliver a presentation about international trends in poultry production. It was enlightening to hear that many of the challenges and opportunities faced by European producers are very similar to what is happening closer to home. Wouter's key messages were

- Meat demand is growing globally, especially in Asia
- Sustainability, welfare, and antibiotic reduction are top priorities
- Data-driven decisions improve efficiency, health, and performance
- Consumer demands matter, but adoption depends on retail and cost considerations
- Whole value-chain collaboration is crucial for sustainable livestock production



Wouter van der Veken

We were all extremely fortunate to hear from Judith Mair about her experience with managing a high-pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H7N6 outbreak on a free-range commercial layer property. Her candid account of the challenges faced by the team provided an opportunity for the audience to appreciate its impact on the team involved. The key messages from Judith's presentation include

- H7N6 HPAI outbreak originated from local LPAI spillover and mutation
- Rapid detection, depopulation, and strict biosecurity are critical to containment
- Multi-step cleaning, disinfection, and standdown periods ensure safe repopulation
- Worker safety and controlled site access are essential during outbreak management
- Continuous surveillance and verification maintain long-term biosecurity and country freedom

This led to a very informative presentation from Matthew Stone about the importance of biosecurity plans and the development of assurance systems. The key takeaways from Matthew's presentation are

- LPAI can mutate into HPAI in high-density poultry with low genetic diversity
- Zoning and compartmentalisation provide structured frameworks to manage biosecurity and trade
- Effective risk management requires identifying pathways, implementing controls, and monitoring outcomes
- Collaboration between industry and veterinary authorities is essential for successful compartmentalisation
- Structured surveillance and assurance systems help maintain animal health and prevent outbreaks



Poultry welfare panel

Next up was a panel discussion about poultry welfare in New Zealand. Perspectives about the current state of play as well as looking into the future were provided on behalf of NAWAC, SPCA and PIANZ. An interesting question and answer session followed with key focus being on the importance of excellent animal husbandry. Some of the other key messages include

- Welfare and social licence are linked; humane practices support trust, reputation, and export value
- Codes of Welfare, contingency planning, and biosecurity preparedness are essential for sustainable poultry production
- Animal welfare must exceed legal minimums to meet ethical and consumer expectations
- Positive welfare interventions include enrichment, shelter, perching, and data-driven management
- Retailers and global food brands are driving systemic change through commitments, auditing, and reporting
- Welfare improvements enhance both animal wellbeing and business performance

The focus of the day then moved to broiler lameness – posing the question whether lameness could be considered the canary in the coalmine – an indicator symptom for many issues within the bird's lifecycle. Perspectives on nutrition, optimisation of gut health, as well as from breeder, hatchery and broiler farm management were provided over five presentations.

Naveed Anwar who has a PhD in poultry nutrition spoke about nutritional causes of lameness, and Wouter van der Veken about optimisation of gut health to prevent lameness. Their key points can be summarised

- Nutritional imbalances are a major cause of broiler lameness
- Key nutrients are calcium, phosphorus, vitamin D3, B1, B12, biotin, manganese
- Gut health and toxin management are critical for nutrient absorption and skeletal health
- Gut health is central to preventing bacterial lameness; dysbiosis increases the risk of BCO and systemic infections
- Probiotics, especially *B. licheniformis* DSMZ 28710, support gut integrity and reduce lameness
- Early, holistic management of chicks including feed, biosecurity, and microbiota support is critical
- Preventing lameness improves both animal welfare and production performance



Panel discussing prevention of broiler lameness

The second panel session of the day followed where the role of breeder, hatchery and broiler farm management in preventing lameness were discussed. Again, there was much interest from the audience and lots of questions were asked of the extremely knowledgeable and practical panel. The importance of a holistic approach, including genetics, nutrition, pathogen control, hygiene, and farm management all being essential to reduce lameness and maintain flock productivity was highlighted. It was stated by the broiler farmer that the goal is greatness: not just good birds, but great birds through holistic care, exceptional husbandry, and continuous improvement.

Feedback from the Seminar was very positive, both the topics and the content of the talks. Attendees also enjoyed the collegiality of networking with a vast array of people working in the industry and gleaned insights and ideas from their peers. A snapshot of comments from the post-seminar survey were :

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fantastic speakers and range of topics...

learned a lot, good, efficient use of time...

very interesting, good technical depth...

the venue was awesome...

*industry connectiveness and collaboration
will be key to our industry success...*

talks were short and sweet yet informative...

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Ed Catherwood, AgriHealth Managing Director

Contact Paul Dwyer if you would like a copy the proceedings for the Seminar (hard and e versions are available). He can also provide you with a more detailed summary document from the presentations, or can present the key insights from the day to you or your team.

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