10 THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN WRITING OUTBREAK RESPONSE PLANS (& LESSONS LEARNED FROM HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA)
Nothing breaks (or makes) a response plan like an outbreak.

Exercises are useful, but real events are always better holistic tests of policies, procedures, and processes.

No outbreak is alike...

But many aspects of all outbreaks are the same.
- Tools in toolbox/response activities.
- Basic org structure/ICS.
- Need for excellent internal and external communication.
2014-2015: 232 Infected Premises (221 commercial, 21 backyard)

2016: mixed LPAI/HPAI event (1 confirmed HPAI premises)

www.aphis.usda.gov/fadprep
USDA APHIS published first version in August 2010.

Revised in September 2011, September 2012.

Between December 2014 and June 2015, the United States experienced the largest HPAI outbreak in U.S. history.

Plan was revised in August 2015 based on lessons learned.

Plan currently scheduled for another revision in Fall 2016.
WRITING PROCESS

- Document drafted (may include sections by specific staffs or subject matter experts).
- Reviewed by Center Director.
- Sent to APHIS Veterinary Services for internal review.
- Sent to States and stakeholders for wider review.
- Document or draft document published.
- New versions: comments accepted from all stakeholders (internal and external) until next version published.
Six chapters:
- introduction/disease agent,
- framework for response/authorities,
- specific incident management,
- response strategy,
- critical activities, and
- recovery.

Strategic level guidance for APHIS VS and intended for all stakeholders’ review and understanding.

Stands alone, but lots of supporting documentation; e.g. SOPs and ‘ready reference guides’.
#1. IT’S GOOD TO START A RESPONSE WITH SOMETHING

- Starting a response to an outbreak with zero on paper is not an ideal situation.
  - Difficult for responding agency.
  - Difficult for internal/external communication.
- Better to have straw men to knock down than a blank piece of paper:
  - Starts discussion.
  - Easier to comment on something than write.
  - May work after all!
- Don’t be hesitant to actually write ideas down to get started.
  - Use what others have done.
#2. DON’T LET PERFECT BE THE ENEMY OF GOOD (AND USEFUL)

- You will NEVER prepare for every contingency.
- You will NEVER solve every problem before an outbreak.
- You will NEVER please everyone.
  - Use consensus.
- A perfect response plan is like a unicorn: really beautiful, doesn’t exist.
- Letting ‘the perfect’ rule can:
  - Inhibit progress on writing response plans.
  - Result in the inability to finish or publish a draft plan.
  - Convolute and overcomplicate critical recommendations.
#3. CONSIDER YOUR AUDIENCE

- Who is the primary audience for your document?
- Who will be the first person to pick it up in an outbreak?
- Who is likely not to ever read the document?

Consider your language.
- If at the strategic level, limit technical jargon.

Consider your format.
- Easy to read.
- Figures are important.
- Say it more than once.
A strategic response plan is a component—can be the foundation, but other documentation is needed.

Other strategic-level guidance may be needed.
- Concept of operations more broadly.

There are at least 25 established documents that support the content of the HPAI response plan.

Tactical-level guidance may be necessary.
- By activity.
- By ICS section.
- By ICS position.
- Other?
#5. KEEP IT ORGANIZED, EFFICIENT

- Consider a document hierarchy: concept of operations documents, disease response plans, guidelines, then standard operating procedures.

- Think more broadly about not only an emergency response plan, but an emergency response planning system.

- Many documents can be general, and work for a wide range of responses.
  - Don’t duplicate material in lots of places.
  - Make it easy to update.
  - Use what already exists.
Foster transparency in the plan and planning process.
- Acknowledgment that others may have great input.
- Additional credibility that others have reviewed the content.

When reviewing feedback, remember the following:
- Sometimes the person that disagrees the loudest doesn’t have the strongest argument.
- Getting a general sense of how the plan is received is very important.
- Everyone has a different perspective and often competing interests.

For every HPAI plan revision, we sent individual responses to all commenters, creating “buy-in” for/to the plan.
#7. MAKE CHANGES WITH A REASON

- Each sentence/paragraph should have a clear reason for why it says what it does, in the way that it does.
- Is the problem related to the wording or to the intention/policy of the statement?
- Just because something worked well in the past doesn’t mean that it shouldn’t be changed:
  - Processes may need to be adapted.
  - Technologies change.
  - Improvements are always welcome.
- Just because something didn’t work once doesn’t mean it might not work again:
  - Focus on the why (why didn’t it work)?
  - Every incident is different.
  - Is that experience generalizable?
The HPAI Response Plan would never have survived first glance in the outbreaks without flexibility.

- Defer to on-the-ground personnel for on-the-ground decisions (e.g., “relevant Local, State, Tribal, and Federal officials”).
- Build in options and multiple ways of reaching the same goal; option can be selected based on the incident.
- Create opportunity and accept the need to re-review things (e.g., case definitions) in an outbreak situation.

Flexibility isn’t a “way out”, it’s a way to ensure the plan remains relevant even in a rapidly changing situation.
Think about work-arounds in an outbreak.
- Unlikely that you want to update the entire response plan mid-incident.
- For HPAI, “policy guidance documents” were issued and developed to flesh out concepts that were not detailed in the Red Book.

Update both routinely and as-needed.
- Schedule routine updates.
  - Comprehensive review of all material.
  - Incorporate lessons-learned from exercises.
  - Reach out to subject matter experts for updates.
- Be ready to update if real incidents dictate (but hold).

Always keep learning about best practices.

HPAI pushed planning for other diseases forward significantly.
It’s nice to have a plan...it’s even better if people know it exists.

Make it easy to access for the intended audience.
- Before an outbreak.
- Immediately after detection.

If possible, make it publicly available on an easy-to-find webpage.

Consider blast emails to ensure everyone has a copy.

Consider specific communication to key parties on issues of shared concern.
The HPAI Response Plan: The Red Book helped USDA APHIS mount a successful response to HPAI.

Some changes were needed after the outbreak.

General structure of the HPAI Response Plan: The Red Book worked well; unchanged.

General structure preparedness and response planning worked well; unchanged.

There are always going to be issues “on the ground”—a good response plan isn’t going to eliminate these (people squabble, equipment breaks, stuff happens); but, a plan can help stakeholders share goals, objectives, and direction.
Thank you!

QUESTIONS?