

63	Study and Action Plan on Post Bird Flu Scenario of Poultry Sector in Assam.	FARMER (Fellowship for Agri Resource Management and Entrepreneurship Research), Guwahati	2010
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Executive Summary

Threat of bird flu has been looming over poultry sector of Assam since the first outbreak in 2006 in Maharashtra. Eventually bird flu emerged in Assam in the year 2008 with 18 episodes of outbreak covering 10 districts in 27 days. The study conducted under patronage of NEDFi recognized that the poultry sector of Assam has unexploited potentialities to contribute towards national growth and development. Analysis of sequences of events of bird flu outbreak and its containment operation revealed gaps in awareness (knowledge) amongst various stakeholders and infrastructures to handle bird flu epidemic in Assam. These gaps have lead to many negative impacts both in qualitative and quantitative terms.

The study estimate total monthly direct loss of income of the commercial broiler chicken farmers alone approximately at Rs.3.5 crore with approximate total market transaction of Rs. 47 crore per month due to wide spread outbreak of bird flu in Assam. The approximate monthly transaction in input market of broiler chicken is estimated at Rs 26.5 crore. Livelihoods of lakhs of small holder farming family who rear poultry as major source of family income were also destabilized due to direct effect of bird flu outbreak and its consequences.

Beginning in early part of '90s, broiler chicken farming at present provides employment to lakhs of educated unemployed and supports rural livelihoods. The broiler meat sector of Assam contributes 1.5 percent to the national broiler meat production which is growing at the rate of 11 percent per annum. This sector also made the state self sufficient in broiler meat with occasional informal export of live birds to neighboring Northeastern states with future potentiality to export to other countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh etc, despite the fact that the state is highly import dependent for inputs like hatching eggs, Day-old-chicks, feeds, medicines etc from other states of India.

The backyard poultry farming with distribution of 71 *desi* bird per square km with an average holding size of 2.59 birds per family (for Northeastern region) plays a crucial role in providing major source of livelihood for about 50 percent of small holder livestock farmers. It is estimated that over 90 percent of all livestock and poultry are owned by small holders and it forms a major source of their family income.

The Indian poultry industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in Agriculture with immense potentialities. Government of India estimate that an increase in annual per caput availability of one egg or 50 gm of poultry meat generates about 20,000 to 25,000 full time jobs along the poultry value chain.

Looking at the above facts and in the scenario of increasing demand for animal protein, food safety issues, problems of employment, stabilizing livelihood, there is an urgent need to have a deep understanding and safeguard the poultry sector of Assam. The study, based on the findings, made few recommendations to protect poultry sector of Assam in particular and other Northeastern states in general. The recommendations are made to meet short term and long term objectives to preserve and nourish the sector for prosperity.

BSL-4 level Diagnostic Laboratory in Assam is one of the major recommendations made by the study to strengthen infrastructure capability of the region. Man power required to run the laboratory is already available in Assam. This laboratory besides handling situation during the time of AI outbreak will also save cost of sending of approximately 3000 to 3500 samples to Bhopal per month as part of regular surveillance by Northeastern states. Additionally, the diagnostic infrastructure will also help in rapid detection of other diseases of zoonotic importance like Swine flu, Rabies, Tuberculosis etc and other endemic diseases of economic importance like Brucellosis, FMD etc. Thus the dedicated service of the laboratory to the entire Northeastern region will bring back lost confidence of the local entrepreneurs, protect livelihood of lakhs of small holder farmers and will prepare ground to bring in private investment to the sector.

Socio-Economic impact assessment of bird flu is recommended to determine national, social and economic intervention priorities. It is also urged to consider interests of the farmers of non-infected area under the frame work of bird flu containment operation in case of any future outbreak of bird flu. One more important recommendations made is to review the compensation and rehabilitation programme in bird flu containment operation which is to be done based on the ground situation to make containment operation more effective.

Development of dynamic database of poultry sector of Assam, raising of risk fund through private public participation as alternative to insurance coverage, assessment of state veterinary services, extensive awareness and sensitization programmes, are the other few important recommendations. The study also made recommendations to bring in synergistic approach to combat the situation of bird flu.

The only poultry sector which made the state self sufficient in at least in broiler meat is under potential threat of devastation, therefore the study emphasis that it is one of the prime responsibilities of the state to take appropriate steps to safeguard it. Else, broiler meat will

also be get added to the import list of the state in near future, adding one more item to the list of imported items like fish, eggs, rice, wheat, livestock feeds etc from other states of India.

A carefully drawn up action plan based on the recommendations and its effective implementation will not only safe guard the sector from potential recurrent threat of bird flu outbreak, but also will boost its growth.