

S.African chickens hit by 'worst' bird flu outbreak

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South African poultry farmers have warned of possible chicken and egg shortages as they battle what the industry says is the worst bird flu outbreak ever to hit the country.

Producer Quantum Foods said on Friday that this year it had lost almost two million chickens—worth a total of more than 100 million rand (\$5.3 million)—because of the disease.

"The [bird flu outbreak](#) is the worst that South Africa has witnessed," fellow producer Astral said in a trading update on Thursday.

"(It) has already caused short supplies of table eggs into the market, and it is expected that the supply of poultry meat into the value chain could be affected negatively in the coming months."

The outbreak has cost it 220 million rand so far, the company said.

One of the continent's major poultry producers, South Africa reported the first bird flu cases in commercial farms in April, according to an industry group.

Earlier this month, the South African Poultry Association (SAPA) said the country was contending with two different strains of the virus, the infamous H5N1 and a new strain identified as H7N6.

The latter was spreading through the northeastern provinces of Mpumalanga and Gauteng "at an alarming rate", according to Astral.

Bird flu does not typically infect humans. But H5N1 is increasingly infecting mammals worldwide, from sea lions in Argentina to foxes in Finland, raising fears it could pass on more easily to humans.

The virus has typically been confined to seasonal outbreaks, but since 2021 cases have emerged year-round, and across the globe, leading to what experts say is the largest outbreak ever seen.

SAPA said the number of avian flu cases in South Africa this year was higher than in any year since the first outbreaks were reported in commercial farms in 2017.

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