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## Japan

### Agricultural Situation

### AI Outbreak in Japan

2004

**Approved by:**

Emiko Purdy, Director, ATO/Osaka  
American Consulate, Osaka-Kobe, Japan

**Prepared by:**

Masahiro Matsumoto, Mktg. Specialist, ATO/Osaka and ECON Osaka

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**Report Highlights:** The third outbreak of avian influenza (AI) at Asada Nosan Funai farm in Tanba, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan, is unprecedented in its scale, far surpassing the previously reported two cases in Yamaguchi Prefecture and Oita Prefecture. The outbreak began on February 18, but remained unreported until authorities received an anonymous tip on February 26. By March 2, the number of chickens dying from AI had reached a startling number of 133,000 out of the farm's total of 250,000. Moreover, 15,532 chickens were shipped from the farm to two major chicken processing plants in Yachiyo, Hyogo Prefecture, and Toyohashi, Aichi Prefecture. Over one million of the farm's eggs were distributed to 17 prefectures since February 20. Although much of the processed poultry meat, eggs, and feathers were thought to be limited to the region, major news media reported March 3 that 23 prefectures have received the infected chickens' meat, eggs, and body parts. Kyoto Prefectural officials have been scrambling to address the issue, but one official exclaimed to the consulate that, "It's chaos here (in Kyoto Prefectural Government). Impact to the regional economy is significant, with food service providers, hotels, and consumers all cutting back on chicken consumption. The major daily newspapers report that the Asada Nosan Company is under investigation for its attempt to cover up the outbreak. With yet another case of AI reported March 3 at the nearby Takada farm, an immediate lift of the ban does not seem imminent. End summary.

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**Summary:** The third outbreak of avian influenza (AI) at Asada Nosan Funai farm in Tanba, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan, is unprecedented in its scale, far surpassing the previously reported two cases in Yamaguchi Prefecture and Oita Prefecture. The outbreak began on February 18, but remained unreported until authorities received an anonymous tip on February 26. By March 2, the number of chickens dying from AI had reached a startling number of 133,000 out of the farm's total of 250,000. Moreover, 15,532 chickens were shipped from the farm to two major chicken processing plants in Yachiyo, Hyogo Prefecture, and Toyohashi, Aichi Prefecture. Over one million of the farm's eggs were distributed to 17 prefectures since February 20. Although much of the processed poultry meat, eggs, and feathers were thought to be limited to the region, major news media reported March 3 that 23 prefectures have received the infected chickens' meat, eggs, and body parts. Kyoto Prefectural officials have been scrambling to address the issue, but one official exclaimed to the consulate that, "It's chaos here (in Kyoto Prefectural Government). Impact to the regional economy is significant, with food service providers, hotels, and consumers all cutting back on chicken consumption. The major daily newspapers report that the Asada Nosan Company is under investigation for its attempt to cover up the outbreak. With yet another case of AI reported March 3 at the nearby Takada farm, an immediate lift of the ban does not seem imminent. End summary.

### -- Avian Flu outbreak in Kyoto

The avian influenza (AI) outbreak began February 18, 2004 at Asada Nosan Funai farm in Tanba, Kyoto Prefecture, when 101 chickens died and another 118 the following day. The number of deaths quickly escalated: from 1,043 on February 20 to 39,362 by February 28, and 67,511 by February 29. By March 2, the number of deaths reached a startling 133,000 out of the farm's total of 250,000. The outbreak, with chickens dying en masse, remained unreported until authorities received an anonymous call on February 26.

On February 28, a test by the National Institute of Animal Health in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture confirmed that the bird flu which had killed the chickens at Asada Nosan Funai farm was the deadly H5N1, the same strain of virus found in the Yamaguchi and Oita Prefecture cases. Although there have not been reports of the virus infecting humans in Japan, the same virus has claimed the lives of 15 people in Vietnam and 7 in Thailand.

The outbreak at Asada Nosan Funai farm is the third AI outbreak in Japan within two months. Prior to the Yamaguchi Prefecture outbreak, the last AI outbreak reported in Japan was in 1952.

Public alarm has continued to soar with the discovery of another outbreak in the same town, Tanba, on March 3; the Takada farm requested an inspection of its chickens upon finding 11 carcasses. The preliminary results tested positive for the AI virus.

**-- Outbreak is widespread**

This AI outbreak is unprecedented in its scale, far surpassing that of Japan's two previously reported cases. While the outbreak remained unreported, the Funai farm shipped 15,532 chickens to two major chicken processing plants. The Arinobe processing plant in Yachiyo, Hyogo Prefecture, received 10,000 chickens and a separate plant in Toyohashi, Aichi Prefecture, received 5,532. The processed meat from Yachiyo was sent to Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, and Shimane prefectures, and the Toyohashi meat was shipped to Niigata. Meanwhile, more than one million of the farm's eggs were distributed to 17 prefectures since February 20.

Initially, much of the processed poultry meat, eggs, and feathers were thought to be limited to the region and thus successfully controllable, excluding a few isolated incidents such as chicken meat from the Yachiyo plant sold in supermarkets, eggs being processed and consumed, and feathers from the infected chickens being used for stuffing at a futon mattress shop in Shikoku. However, according to mass media reports on March 3, twenty-three prefectures have received the infected chickens' meat, eggs or body parts, inciting widespread consumer panic.

**-- Assuring consumers**

To diffuse some of the alarm, officials emphasize the fact that human contraction of AI has not been reported in Japan. In addition, some recipient prefectures and food companies have said that they do not anticipate recalling potentially contaminated product based on the assumption that the H5N1 virus is killed when cooked under high temperatures.

**-- Local Government Response**

At the local level, government officials are frantically working to bring the situation under control after having been heatedly criticized for disorganization, miscommunication, and delayed action.

Kyoto's prefectural government has ordered all of the farm's remaining chickens to be destroyed. Those that are still alive are to be placed in a vinyl bag, gassed, and then buried. The people of Tanba have vocalized their concern about the disposal methods, arguing that burying the incinerated chickens and eggs at the farm poses a future threat not only to the environment, but also to the people's health. Addressing their fears, Kyoto Governor Keiji Yamada and Tanba Mayor Yoshio Yokoyama announced at a press conference on March 2 that the burial would occur at a mountain near the Funai farm. Other measures to prevent the bird flu's spread include: testing migratory birds at surrounding water sources; urging veterinarians and poultry organizations to report any abnormalities; and establishing an information hotline system for the public.

In Kyoto municipality, extensive efforts are now underway to collect the contaminated chicken parts and eggs by tracking their distribution and sales to supermarkets, cooperative markets, and restaurants; some of the chicken and eggs are suspected to have already been consumed.

Kyoto Shimbun reported March 3rd that Governor Keiji Yamada and the Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF) reached agreement March 2nd that JSDF's Itami base would contribute to containment efforts, including the slaughter of chickens. Kyoto officials have been checking every store in the city, determining whether its poultry came from the infected Funai farm. The situation is now deemed "an urgent crisis," and no official is allowed time off. Another Kyoto official reported March 4th that all Kyoto Prefectural government sections have been assigned to rotating teams to assist with the slaughtering. Similar to the resistance in Tanba, Kyoto residents are protesting against burying the carcasses near their homes.

### -- Latest Development by Local Government

In the Kyoto prefectural Government web site, they alert people not to touch dead birds with their bare hands and to contact a local health center if people have any anxiety. Kyoto prefecture asks the residence to remain calm since no case that the AI virus is transmitted to humans by eating poultry meat or eggs has been reported in the world.

Kyoto prefecture has set up a "Hot Line" in several languages such as English, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean and Chinese for overseas residence.

### -- Economic Impact

Local as well as some national supermarket chains have taken measures to withdraw all eggs and other chicken products originating from anywhere in the region and, consequently, the poultry market has been seriously crippled. Kyoto wholesalers are reporting a 30 percent decline in poultry sales and a 10 percent decline in egg sales.

Contributing further to the local market's economic plight are the two shipping bans that were implemented on February 29. The bans cover land within a 30-kilometer radius of the Asada Nosan Funai farm in Kyoto Prefecture and a poultry meat processing plant in Yachiyo, Hyogo Prefecture. In addition to operations in Kyoto and Hyogo, these banned areas affect three other large poultry farms and freeze the transport of 2 million chickens and their eggs. As a result, the prefectures' poultry farmers are experiencing substantial revenue losses due to the expenses incurred from the maintenance of their unmarketable stock.

Major hotels in Kansai have also felt the impact. One major hotel administrator said that, due to his predominantly Japanese customer base, he has purchased less chicken and more pork, now offering fewer chicken dishes. Another major hotel administrator noted that he would reduce chicken purchases, but pointed out that beef still remains the preferable choice of meat in Kansai, and that BSE has affected his business much more than the Avian Influenza.

After the Tanba outbreak hit the news, chicken sales at yakitori restaurants (restaurants specializing in barbecued and grilled chicken) have dropped significantly, according to one of Kansai region's chain restaurant executives. Another restaurant executive told ATO/Osaka that: "The impact in the Yamaguchi and Oita cases was relatively small. However, the Tanba case has impacted consumers dramatically since the town of Tanba is located in the Kansai region and the number of chickens dying is much larger than the Oita and Yamaguchi cases. In addition, nobody seems to know the real extent of the spread of the disease."

One consumer commented to ATO/Osaka that: "After watching the massive number of chickens being destroyed on TV, consumers are disgusted with eating chicken." This sentiment is now evident at restaurants where the orders for chicken dishes have halved, and raw chicken dishes are not being requested at all. The restaurants, when purchasing chicken, are now inquiring about its origin. The food service industry expects the consumption of chicken to decline further.

### **-- Suspected cover up**

The Funai farm is one of Kyoto's largest and is part of the Asada Nosan conglomerate that maintains four farms, raising 1.75 millions chickens in Kyoto and Okayama prefectures for poultry processing and egg production. The number of chickens raised in Asada Nosan accounts for 27 percent of the chickens raised in Kyoto and Okayama Prefectures combined. The conglomerate is owned by Hideaki Asada and his father, Hajimu Asada, who deny accusations that they purposely concealed the outbreak. The major daily newspapers report that the Asada Nosan Company is currently being investigated for its attempt to cover up the case. New evidence shows that President Hideaki Asada rebuffed the plant processors' earlier concerns by claiming that the chickens shipped to Yachiyo died because of dehydration. The media reported also that the president contacted the plant's managing director in an attempt to sell the entire stock of infected chickens before inspections interfered.

Recent developments include Hideaki Asada's dismissal as the Vice-Chairman of the Japan Poultry Association, and his resignation as head of the Hyogo Prefectural Poultry Association. Asada Nosan Company has announced that permanently ceased all operations at the Funai farm. Governmental officials are exploring possible criminal charges and other legal action against Hideaki Asada and Asada Nosan. The Livestock Disease Control Law explicitly requires farmers and veterinarians to promptly report suspicion of a bird flu outbreak. A violator of the law will be charged one-year imprisonment or a fine up to 300,000 yen (approx. \$2,800.)

On March 8<sup>th</sup>, the news media reported that Mr. Hajime Asada and his wife committed suicide to take responsibility for the incident.

### **-- Timing for the ban to be lifted**

It took two months for Yamaguchi Prefecture to lift their ban on poultry shipments from the farm area where the outbreak occurred. Under the Livestock Disease Control Law, the restriction will be removed 28 days after the complete destruction of the birds. However, considering that yet another case of outbreak is being reported at the nearby Takada farm on March 3, lifting the ban within 28 days may be difficult.