

# Viet Nam fights back with sweeping **vaccination** campaign



MASSIVE  
INFORMATION  
EFFORT  
CONVINCED  
POULTRY  
FARMERS



**Main photo:** Activities at a vaccination point in northern Viet Nam. (FAO/H. D. Nam)  
**Left:** A woman arrives with chickens to be vaccinated. (FAO/H. D. Nam)

**HANOI, Viet Nam** – In 2004–2005, the bird flu virus was ravaging the country with outbreaks in nearly every region and millions of birds culled to contain the disease. Forty-two people contracted the virus and died. As authorities faced a growing threat to human health they took the decision in 2005 to vaccinate all of the country's 220 million chickens.

Today, the success of Viet Nam's vaccination campaign can be measured by the fact that in 2006, up until May, not one person died from H5N1, nor has there been a single outbreak among poultry.

According to Dr Hoang Van Nam, Deputy Director of Viet Nam's Department of Animal Health, the decision to vaccinate was not difficult. "If outbreaks are occurring literally everywhere, eradication is really not an option. So, as the

disease came in waves, we geared up at the end of the second wave and began vaccinating poultry before the arrival of the third wave."

#### Farmers enthusiastic

In rural northern Viet Nam in April, multitudes of backyard farmers could be seen on their scooters or trekking along village roads, carrying their chickens to be vaccinated.

In An Thuong village, north of Hanoi, District Veterinary Director Pham Cong Van explained, "We have 168 vaccination points in the district. By using posters and broadcast media we let people know where we will vaccinate and when and we make sure people are aware of the benefits of vaccination and the dangers of not getting their poultry vaccinated."

Nguyen Thi Binh, a backyard farmer in her 60s, arrived at the

vaccination point with 70 chickens and ducks, which she carried in two wicker baskets balanced by a pole over her shoulder. "My chickens and ducks are mainly food for the family, but I do sell a few of them. While there's never been a case of bird flu in this village, we want to make sure to keep it that way. I'm very happy with this service from the government, especially that it's free."

According to Dr Nam, "From the very beginning of the first bird flu outbreaks we got a lot of help from FAO, which recruited and funded a consultant with extensive experience about the H5N1 virus from the early years when it first surfaced in China and Hong Kong. They also gave us funding from their Technical Cooperation Programme, both before and during the vaccination campaign."

FAO also provided "cull boxes"

“If outbreaks are occurring literally everywhere, eradication is really not an option.”

Dr Hoang Van Nam - Deputy Director, Department of Animal Health



for the humane disposal of sick and exposed birds and protective clothing and gear for the vaccination teams. More recently, it provided Global Positioning System (GPS) devices, which show exact latitude and longitude, to help map and study outbreaks of the disease.

### Campaign logistics

When the government began the campaign, animal health officials knew success would require a massive and coordinated effort.

“We had to train vaccinators and ensure the cold chain for the vaccine. We secured 280 million doses of vaccine from China to vaccinate 87 million chickens and 40 million ducks in the first round of vaccinations between October and December 2005,” said Dr Nam.

Dr Nguyen Dang Vang, Director, Department of Livestock Production, says, “More than 100 000 people

were mobilized for the vaccination campaign. I think our success can be attributed to the determination of Viet Nam’s leadership, dedication of local authorities and the information campaign, which was really critical to our efforts.”

According to Dr Nam, “The cost of the overall vaccination campaign is hard to estimate, because Viet Nam’s response has been so decentralized. In the north people bring their chickens to a central vaccination point, but in the south animal health workers must go house-to-house vaccinating. They are paid US\$3 a day plus a small amount for each bird vaccinated. This was funded by the United States Agency for International Development.”

To export poultry, a country must prove to export markets that it is free of any diseases and Dr Nam points out, “All that costs a lot, so there is no benefit for Viet Nam to increase production of poultry for export, especially since we cannot produce enough for our own domestic needs.”

Changes to Viet Nam’s poultry sector are on the way, driven by health concerns. The country is reorganizing poultry farming to ensure better biosecurity, animal health officials say. With FAO advice, options for restructuring are evaluated including assessment of the impact on poor farmers’ livelihoods, and policies to mitigate negative consequences.

Viet Nam has not sounded the all clear yet, but across the country

there is a sense of relief that the worst may be over. Poultry markets are still depressed and chicken smuggling across the border with China remains problematic, but continued vaccination and intense surveillance hold the promise of continued success. ←



**Left:** Poultry consumption in Viet Nam has declined due to fear of contracting bird flu, although authorities continue to reassure consumers that well cooked chicken is safe to eat. (FAO/H. D. Nam)

**Right:** Public service posters promote good hygiene as a way to prevent bird flu transmission. (FAO/H. D. Nam)

**Top, right:** Dr Hoang Van Nam, right, Deputy Director of Viet Nam’s Department of Animal Health, describes the challenges of vaccinating 220 million chickens. (FAO/H. D. Nam)

