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**Government must address potential avian flu crisis**

**This latest outbreak of Avian Influenza is a reminder that a major pandemic is not far away says Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive of leading farm animal welfare charity Compassion in World Farming.**

“Whilst the first priority is ensuring the cull of birds at the farm in Banbury is swift and humane, the government must wake up to the real threat of a major avian influenza pandemic,” says Philip Lymbery, Chief Executive of Compassion in World Farming.

“We understand that the government plan to carry out the culling swiftly and humanely with containerised gassing and we urge them to take a consistent approach if further outbreaks occur.

“Although this recent outbreak of Avian Influenza is H7, not the deadly H5N1, the government cannot afford to shy away from the potential but realistic threat bird flu poses for poultry and people.

“Research shows that intensive farming is often implicated in both the cause and the spread of Avian Influenza. With billions of chickens bred intensively worldwide we have a small window of opportunity to move away from factory farming and the continuing risk posed by highly pathogenic strains of avian flu.

“It’s more important now than ever before for consumers to support free-range and organic poultry and egg farmers by buying their products.”

**NOTES**

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## Background

### Humane culling:

- Containerised gassing with an inert gas mixture (carbon dioxide mixed with argon) is the best option available to Defra. This will maximise the likelihood that animals are unconscious at the time of slaughter, in line with World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) guidelines.

### Avian flu and factory farming:

- Compassion in World Farming's report [The Role of the Intensive Poultry Production Industry in the Spread of Avian Influenza](#) shows that intensive farms provide circumstances for increased mutation and spread of the virus.

- In June 2007 FAO produced a report confirming the link between bird flu and industrial farming. [Industrial Livestock Production and Global Health Risks](#) shows that industrial poultry production, with overcrowding of thousands of animals, is drastically increasing the likelihood of transfer among animals and to humans.

The report also shows that bird 'flu is mainly spread by the trade in poultry and poultry products – contrary to the common assertion that it is spread by wild birds. Animals confined in industrial units produce large amounts of waste – often disposed of on land and in water courses posing a risk for further spread. It also exposes the myth that industrial farms can be kept biosecure, showing that it is impossible to stop diseases getting into such farms, with the high intensity of production risking increased spread as ventilation systems pump out contaminated air.

- Research by leading avian flu scientist and MD, Dr Michael Greger, of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) in his recent book: *Bird Flu: A virus of our own hatching* (available at [www.birdflubook.org](http://www.birdflubook.org)) looks at risks of a pandemic compared to that of 1918. Greger and other public health authorities predict that a pandemic is inevitable and will cause millions of human deaths around the world.