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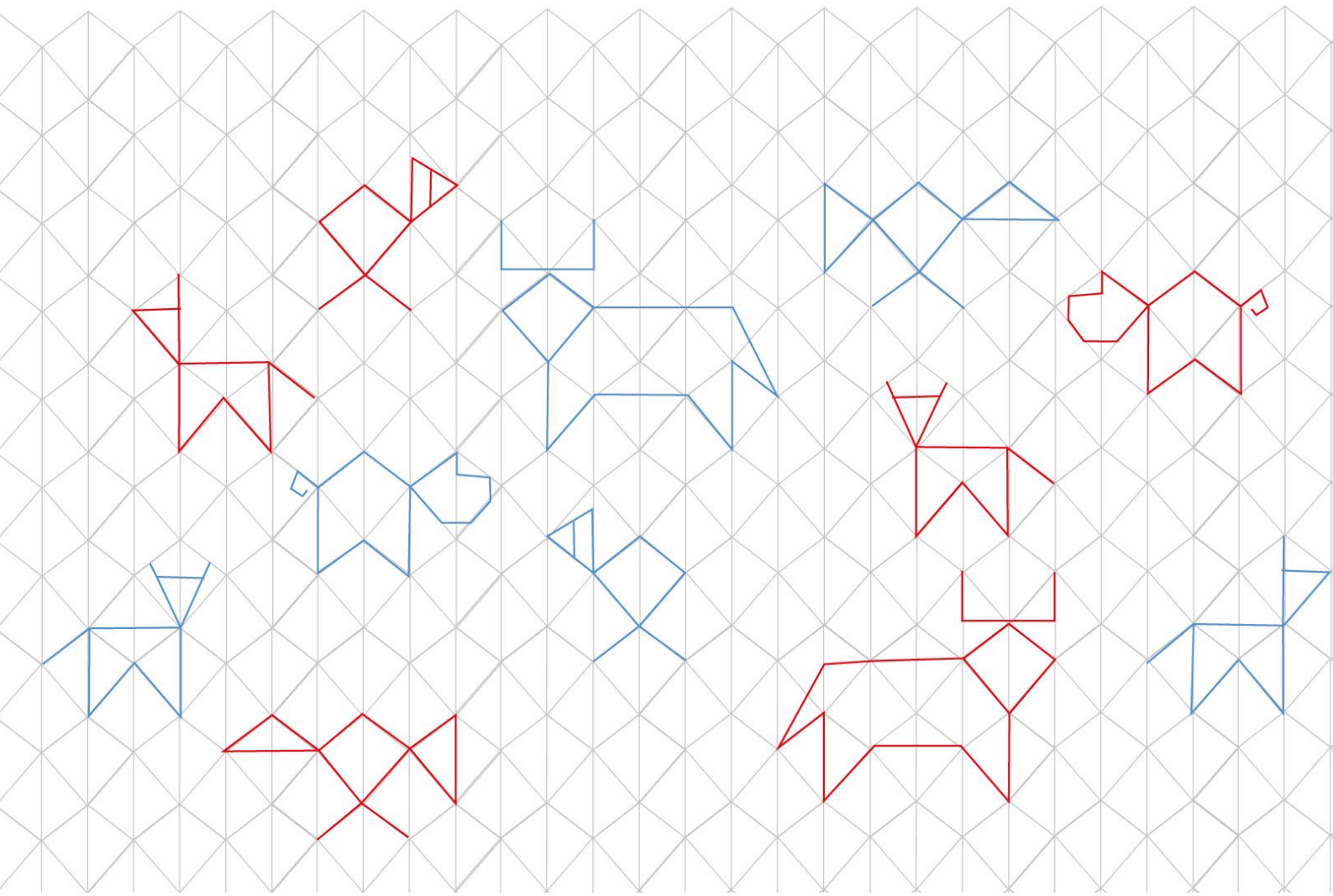


World Organisation  
for Animal Health  
Founded as OIE

# 4<sup>th</sup> Standing Group of Experts on Avian Influenza (SGE-AI) for the GF-TADs of the Americas.

## *Report*

June 11, 2026



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(SGE-AI) for the GF-TADs of the Americas.

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# Abbreviations

CAHFSA: Caribbean Agricultural Health and Food Safety Agency

CaribVET: Caribbean Animal Health Network

CDC: United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CFIA: Canadian Food Inspection Agency

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GF-TADs: Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases

HPAI: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza

IICA: Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture

LFDA: Federal Agricultural Defense Laboratory

MAPA: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock of Brazil

NCFAD: National Centre for Foreign Animal Disease, Winnipeg

NVSL: National Veterinary Services Laboratories, United States

OIRSA: International Regional Organization for Agricultural Health

PAHO-PANAFTOSA: Pan American Foot-and-Mouth Disease Center and Veterinary Public Health

SAG: Agricultural and Livestock Service of Chile

SG-CAN: General Secretariat of the Andean Community

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture

WOAH: World Organisation for Animal Health

# Executive Summary

The 4th Meeting of the GF-TADs Americas Standing Group of Experts on Avian Influenza (SGE-AI) brought together representatives of international organizations (WOAH, FAO, OIRSA, IICA, CAHFS, PAHO/WHO-PANAFTOSA, and OFFLU), reference laboratories from Brazil, Canada, and the United States, regional diagnostic networks, and technical experts. The meeting aimed to assess the epidemiological situation of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), review progress in regional coordination mechanisms, and strengthen capacities for surveillance, diagnosis, risk assessment, and emergency preparedness through an integrated approach.

The meeting commenced with an update on the global and regional epidemiological situation of HPAI, highlighting that the disease continues to represent one of the major health threats to poultry production, wildlife, and an increasing number of mammalian species. Participants were informed that during the 2025–2026 season, a significant increase in outbreaks among domestic and wild birds was recorded worldwide, with the H5N1 virus remaining the predominant subtype. It was also noted that the Americas continue to be among the most affected regions, experiencing substantial production losses and widespread viral circulation in wildlife populations.

National and regional experiences related to epidemiological surveillance, diagnosis, and genomic characterization of the virus were subsequently presented. Particular attention was given to the Canadian experience, where the response has been based on close coordination among government agencies, academic institutions, and wildlife surveillance stakeholders, strengthening capacities for early detection, genetic sequencing, and risk analysis. Presentations consistently underscored the importance of maintaining robust integrated surveillance systems and expanding monitoring capacities in mammals in light of the growing evidence of interspecies transmission events.

The South American Avian Influenza Diagnostic Network (RESUDIA) presented progress achieved in strengthening diagnostic capacities, including the implementation of interlaboratory proficiency testing, training activities, and the adoption of advanced molecular and genomic methodologies in several countries across the region. Nevertheless, challenges were identified regarding access to next-generation sequencing technologies, the availability of reference materials, and the need to further strengthen bioinformatics and genomic analysis capacities. In addition, a regional proposal was discussed to facilitate the secure and timely exchange of genetic sequence data among countries.

At the human-animal interface, PAHO/WHO presented the progress of the Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention and Control of Zoonotic Influenza in the Americas (CIPCIZA), highlighting its consolidation as a strategic coordination mechanism among the human health, animal health, and environmental sectors. Progress achieved by the technical working groups on surveillance, risk analysis, laboratory capacities, and genomic surveillance was emphasized, together with planned actions aimed at strengthening preparedness, response, and risk communication over the coming years.

The meeting also included an update on OFFLU's Avian Influenza Matching (AIM) project, which seeks to assess the antigenic match between circulating H5 viruses and available avian influenza vaccines. The results presented demonstrated increasing antigenic diversity within H5 clade 2.3.4.4b, highlighting the need for periodic updates of vaccine strains and the generation of additional scientific evidence to support decision-making on vaccination strategies. It was emphasized that vaccination should be considered a complementary tool within comprehensive control programs that also include biosecurity measures, epidemiological surveillance, and continuous monitoring of viral evolution.

# Key Discussion Points

## Recommendations from the 3rd Meeting of the SGE-AI

The recommendations arising from the 3rd Meeting of the GF-TADs Americas Standing Group of Experts on Avian Influenza (SGE-AI), held in February 2025, focused on the following key areas:

- Strengthening regional and interinstitutional cooperation among countries and international organizations.
- Enhancing epidemiological surveillance and early detection systems.
- Strengthening diagnostic capacities and regional laboratory networks.
- Promoting research, risk assessment, and the timely exchange of information.
- Advancing biosecurity, risk communication, and coordination under the One Health approach.
- Reinforcing political and financial support to ensure the sustainability of prevention and control efforts.

## HPAI Situation in Canada

Dr. Anthony V. Signore of the NCFAD presented an update on the HPAI situation in Canada, highlighting the following points:

- Evolution of national surveillance based on an integrated One Health approach.
- Strengthening of diagnostic and genomic sequencing capacities.
- Importance of wildlife surveillance for early detection.
- Use of genomic analyses to better understand viral dissemination dynamics.
- Effective coordination among government agencies, universities, Indigenous communities, and international organizations.

## Global and Regional HPAI Situation (WOAH)

Dr. Paolo Tizzani from WOAH's Data Integration and Analysis Department delivered a presentation on the Global and Regional HPAI Situation, emphasizing the following elements:

- Increase in avian influenza outbreaks during the 2025–2026 season.
- Global predominance of the H5N1 virus.
- Significant increase in cases among wild birds.
- Economic impact related to the loss of millions of domestic birds.
- Expansion of the virus to a growing number of mammalian species.
- Importance of timely reporting through WAHIS and other surveillance systems.
- Need to strengthen biosecurity and international coordination.

## HPAI Situation in the United States

Dr. Mia Torchetti of the USDA APHIS NVSL presented an update on the HPAI situation in the United States, complementing the information presented by Canada and further elaborating on the following topics:

- Genetic diversification of the H5N1 virus in North America.
- Identification of numerous genotypes through genomic characterization tools.
- Expansion of surveillance activities in wild and domestic birds.
- Emergence and spread of cases in cattle and other mammalian species.
- Importance of genomic surveillance to detect relevant viral changes.
- Continuous assessment of the risk of viral adaptation to new host species.

## Progress of the South American Avian Influenza Diagnostic Network (RESUDIA)

Dr. Dilmara Reischak of LFPDA-SP, Brazil, presented a summary of RESUDIA activities in support of South American countries and the integration of other countries in the region, focusing on:

- Development of regional workshops and specialized training programs.
- Implementation of interlaboratory proficiency testing to evaluate diagnostic performance.
- Strengthening of molecular diagnostic and genetic sequencing capacities.
- Need to expand capacities in genomics, metagenomics, and bioinformatics.
- Discussion of regional mechanisms for the exchange of genetic sequence data, initially in the realm of the Southern Cone Permanent Veterinary Committee (CVP)..
- Importance of continuously updating diagnostic methods in response to viral evolution.
- Need for greater access to reference materials and proficiency testing schemes.
- Opportunity to contribute to OFFLU's AIM project by providing data from South America

## Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention and Control of Zoonotic Influenza in the Americas (CIPCIZA)

Dr. Lia Buzanovsky of PAHO/PANAFTOSA and Dr. Priscila Born of PAHO/WHO presented the activities of CIPCIZA at the human-animal interface, highlighting the following aspects:

- Consolidation of the Commission as a regional coordination mechanism.
- Joint participation of the human health, animal health, and environmental sectors.
- Strengthening of integrated surveillance under the One Health approach.
- Development of common methodologies for risk assessment.
- Promotion of regional genomic surveillance.
- Need for interoperable systems and common standards for information exchange.
- Creation of new working groups on preparedness, response, and risk communication.
- Planning of the Commission's first Assembly in 2027.

## Avian Influenza Matching (AIM) Project – OFFLU

Dr. Lorcan Carnegie of OFFLU presented an update on the Avian Influenza Matching (AIM) project, highlighting findings related to:

- Assessment of the antigenic match between circulating viruses and available vaccines.
- Increasing antigenic diversity within H5 clade 2.3.4.4b.
- Identification of significant differences between vaccine strains and field viruses.
- Need for periodic updates of vaccine seed strains.
- Importance of generating scientific evidence to guide vaccination-related decisions.
- Promotion of greater participation by countries in the Americas in the exchange of samples and data.
- Recognition of vaccination as a complementary tool within comprehensive disease control strategies.

## Conclusions

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) continues to represent a significant animal health threat at the regional level due to its persistence in both wild and domestic bird populations, its geographic expansion, and its increasing detection in mammals. This situation reinforces the need to maintain a One Health approach and a coordinated response among countries.

Participants agreed on the importance of strengthening and harmonizing regional surveillance, diagnostic, and genomic characterization strategies, promoting the standardization of methodologies and the timely exchange of epidemiological information. They also highlighted the need to disseminate and consistently apply the case definition established in international standards in order to improve early detection and enhance data comparability across countries.

The importance of ensuring the sustainability of accreditation and quality management systems in national laboratories was emphasized, as well as the need to advance the harmonization of diagnostic techniques capable of differentiating vaccine-induced antibodies from those resulting from natural infection. Such efforts would strengthen the technical support available for vaccination and surveillance programs.

Participants further recognized the need to improve understanding of the role that shared environments among susceptible species may play in virus transmission, strengthen biosecurity measures, and maintain regional cooperation as a key element for enhancing disease prevention, preparedness, and response.

In conclusion, participants agreed that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza continues to evolve and remains a complex animal health challenge requiring coordinated responses at the national, regional, and international levels. They reaffirmed the importance of strengthening technical cooperation among countries, consolidating regional surveillance and diagnostic networks, expanding sequencing and genomic analysis capacities, promoting the timely exchange of information, and reinforcing intersectoral coordination under the One Health approach. The need for sustained investments in preparedness and response was also highlighted in order to reduce the animal health, economic, and social impacts of future zoonotic influenza events in the region.

This document has been produced under the umbrella of



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