



## Two working bird flu vaccines, so what next?

Major news across Europe: Wageningen Bioveterinary Research (WBVR) has established that two vaccines have shown good results in the lab, providing protection against avian flu and stopping it from spreading. What does and doesn't this mean for the 100 million chickens in the Netherlands and the threat of a pandemic?

The European poultry industry eagerly awaits bird flu vaccines. All the more so since 12 March, when new legislation allowed vaccinating against avian flu in Europe. Strict surveillance measures are required, however. After vaccination, weekly tests must be done and a veterinarian must visit every four weeks. Completely unworkable rules, said the Utrecht professor of Poultry Health Care Sjaak de Wit on the TV show *Een Vandaag*. 'We don't have enough vets to do that.'

A field trial of the two vaccines will follow this summer at a commercial poultry farm. Vaccines do not always work so well on such farms. Researcher Evelien Germeraad: 'In a large barn, chickens face more factors that can affect their health and resilience. Such as the presence of certain pathogens and the administration of other vaccines.'

### Hundreds of millions of vaccines

Would the vaccine also require annual boosters, like the human flu shot? Not initially, Germeraad says. 'Both these HVT-H5 vaccines offer broad protection against various influenza virus strains of the H5 subtype. If the H7 subtype virus enters the Netherlands, another vaccine will be needed.'

There are always about 100 million chickens in the Netherlands, so several hundred million vaccines will be needed annually if the vaccine enters the market. There is no telling yet how much it will cost. But gasping around six million poultry birds in 2022 cost more than 44 million euros.

If the vaccines prove to work in the barn, they will only be used on commercial poultry farms. So the virus will remain present in the wild, affecting wild birds and also mammals such as dolphins. <sup>RL</sup>