

FEATURE – USDA TOP SCIENTIST PROTECTS POULTRY

INTRO: One of the US Dept of Agriculture's top scientists is being recognized for inventing a rapid test to detect diseases in poultry. USDA's Pat O'Leary has more. (1:53)

AVIAN INFLUENZA AND EXOTIC NEWCASTLE DISEASE ARE THREATS TO U.S POULTRY AND OTHER INDUSTRIES. BUT A RAPID TEST FOR DETECTING THE VIRUSES WAS DEVELOPED AT THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE IN ATHENS, GEORGIA. MICROBIOLOGIST ERICKA SPACKMAN WITH USDA'S AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH SERVICE HELPED DEVELOP THE TEST, AND IS BEING RECOGNIZED WITH THE ARS EARLY CAREER SCIENTIST OF THE YEAR AWARD.

Erica Spackman, USDA ARS Scientist of the Year: Having a rapid test allows us to contain and respond to an outbreak much more rapidly than previously, and also now allows for birds to be tested prior to being sent to processing. We collect samples from chickens or turkeys or domestic ducks or whatever the case may be. This test is also used on wild birds. Once the samples are collected we process them to extract the nucleic acid and the results can be interpreted immediately.

SPACKMAN SAYS THE RAPID TEST IS BEING ADOPTED IN THE U.S. AND INTERNATIONALLY.

We've trained people and people have used it pretty much around the world. It's been used by the National Animal Health Lab Network in the U.S. as well as other labs. And outside of the U.S. it's been used by numerous veterinary diagnostic labs. For the general public this is most important for consumer confidence because it allows us to ensure that the flocks are free of these viruses prior to processing by giving us a diagnosis rapidly that can be acted upon.

SPACKMAN SAYS HER TEAM AND MANY COLLABORATORS SHARE IN THE ARS AWARD.

Personally it's a really nice thing to have worked on a project that has had so much impact on different labs and being able to work with people from around the world who have adopted the tests. So it's been a great way to start a career.

FOR THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M PAT O'LEARY.