

## Cockfighting and Avian Flu February 7, 2025

Cockfighting is a criminal industry in the United States that profits from severe cruelty to animals. It involves pitting two roosters with metal weapons attached to their legs to fight to the death.

Notably, it also poses a significant risk to the spread of avian disease, including Highly Pathogenic Avian influenza H5N1 (HPAI), commonly known as **avian flu**.

Cockfighting is associated with the spread of avian disease particularly because of gamefowl yards – large tracts of land where roosters are bred and sold for the purpose of fighting. The birds, often hundreds or thousands of them, are typically raised tethered outside without protection from wild birds, transported across the country (or world) without oversight or vaccinations, and often exposed to bloody birds.

The **National Chicken Council** has testified that cockfighting is “*an inhumane practice that presents a continuing threat to the health of commercial flocks*”.

### Specifics on Avian Influenza

- In Thailand and Vietnam, the World Health Organization is aware of at least eight deaths from avian flu caused by exposure to cockfighting.
- Since the first outbreak, an astounding 156.25 million birds in the U.S. were killed due to avian influenza; 772 commercial flocks and 809 backyard flocks.
- Avian flu has infected more than 66 people in the U.S., including the [first human death in Louisiana](#); the death being attributed to contact with a "non-commercial backyard flock" and wild birds – which could describe a gamefowl yard. There is no substantive difference.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)) [recently warned](#) that farm workers, including “backyard bird flock owners” (such as gamefowl workers), are the most likely to become infected with avian flu.

### Avian Flu in Maryland

- Since the first avian flu outbreak, Maryland has had fourteen infected flocks – eleven commercial operations and three backyard flocks with almost 2.8 birds culled – a significant negative impact on the Maryland poultry industry that could very well get much worse.
- So far in 2025, five outbreaks of avian flu have been identified by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA); including chicken flocks at two Caroline County commercial poultry farms, and similar operations in Queen Anne, Dorchester and Worcester counties.
- The [MDA implores backyard poultry](#) owners to call their #800 number to report signs of avian flu, and the state requires their premises *to be registered*. Cockfighters are criminals. They are very unlikely to report sick birds or register their premises with the state.



*A cockfighter sucking the blood out of a fighting rooster so the bird can continue to fight.*