



Nine poultry farmers in India commit suicide after bird flu hits business



MUMBAI, India - Nine **poultry**¹ farmers have committed suicide and thousands more face penury as the threat of bird **flu**² has hit farmers hard in the Western state of Maharashtra, according to the National Egg Coordination Committee (NECC).

India has started **culling**³ operations in earnest with thousands of birds culled in the last few months. This had brought down the demand for poultry food and consequently hit the farmers very hard. The country's \$7.8 billion poultry industry has been the worst affected claiming that the last two months had resulted in losses totalling \$2.2 billion.

The culling operations did manage to control the bird flu, but it has continued **to rear**⁴ its ugly head in Maharashtra. **Beleaguered**⁵ farmers have lost the only means of their **livelihood**⁶ and hence felt that suicide was the best course, « Nine farmers across India have committed suicide after their businesses suffered huge losses » said OP Singh, member of the NECC. These farmers took the fatal decision in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, in the last 15 days as their businesses **collapsed**⁷. « Most small poultry owners start their business by selling off land and jewellery. And when they can't recover their costs, they are left with no choice » Singh said.

He added that of the 123,000 poultry farmers in India, 70 percent were in a grave situation due to the **outbreak**⁸ of the H5N1 virus bird flu and the subsequent culling operations. Although the government and the poultry industry have been encouraging people to eat chicken that is properly, the public is too scared to respond. The **wholesale**⁹ price of chicken, which was 20 rupees a kg before bird flu hit has now fallen to just 4 rupees a kg, the poultry industry said. The government has assured financial support to those farmers whose birds have been culled. However, Singh is not satisfied with this provision, « What about those whose birds are not being culled but who aren't able to sell their stocks ? » he asked. With the threat of bird flu showing no signs of **abating**¹⁰, these are tough times indeed for poultry farmers.

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Date : 13/04/2006

Source : Earth times website, News Category : Health (<http://www.earthtimes.org/>)

Link : <http://www.earthtimes.org/articles/show/6122.html>

VOCABULARY

1. **poultry** : refers to chickens, ducks, and other birds that are kept for their eggs and meat.
2. **flu** : it is an illness which is similar to a bad cold but more serious. It often makes you feel very weak and makes your muscles hurt.
3. **to cull** : to kill the weaker animals in a group in order to reduce their numbers.
4. **to rear** : to rear a young animal means you keep and look after it until it's old enough to be used for work or food, or until it can look after itself.
5. **beleaguered** : a beleaguered person is experiencing a lot of difficulties, opposition or criticism.
6. **livelihood** : it's the job or other source of income that gives you the money to buy the things you need.
7. **to collapse** : if something collapses, it fails or comes to an end completely and suddenly.
8. **outbreak** : an outbreak of something unpleasant, such as violence or a disease, means it suddenly starts to happen.
9. **wholesale** : activity of buying and selling goods in large quantities and therefore at cheaper prices, usually to shopkeepers who then sell them to the public.
10. **to abate** : to become much less strong or severe.



QUOTATIONS FOR FURTHER DEBATE

« Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. »

George Orwell (1903-1950), *Animal Farm*, 20th century British author and journalist, best known for 2 famous novels: *Animal Farm* and *1984*.

« If one person is unkind to an animal it is considered to be cruelty, but where a lot of people are unkind to animals, especially in the name of commerce, the cruelty is condoned and, once large sums of money are at stake, will be defended to the last by otherwise intelligent people. »

Ruth Harrison, *Animal Machines*.

« Whenever people say 'We mustn't be sentimental,' you can take it they are about to do something cruel. And if they add 'We must be realistic,' they mean they are going to make money out of it. »

Brigid Brophy (1929-1995), was an English novelist, essayist, critic, biographer, and dramatist.

« We live in a world which is full of misery and ignorance, and the plain duty of each and all of us is to try to make the little corner he can influence somewhat less miserable and somewhat less ignorant than it was before he entered it. »

Thomas Huxley (1825-1895), was a British biologist, known as « Darwin's Bulldog » for his defence of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.