

US poultry experts using Google to beat bird flu

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Poultry experts are turning to sophisticated computer imaging to help them prepare for the expected arrival of the deadly bird flu virus in the United States later this year.

Geographic Information System (GIS) technology is being used to pinpoint the location of commercial poultry flocks, feed mills and processing plants, said Sherrill Davison, professor of avian medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

The information will be used to help create buffer zones around an infected flock and contain the H5N1 strain when it makes its U.S. appearance.

Since the beginning of the year, experts have also been using Google Earth , which combines satellite imagery, maps and the company's search engine to span the globe. It gives extra details including the location of buildings, schools and roads near large chicken and turkey farms and production facilities.

"Twenty years ago we had to drive around the countryside and find the chicken farm that reported a disease, but now everything is on a mapping system," Davison told Reuters in a recent interview.

"Now, we can very quickly, within about an hour, know exactly how many farms are in an (affected) area. Then we can know which farms to send teams to for extra sampling.

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