

Ostrich, chicken meat safe despite bird flu

ANA REPORTER

THE Western Cape Department of Agriculture yesterday said bird flu (Avian influenza) – a controlled disease – has been positively diagnosed on two ostrich farms in the Heidelberg area.

Vets from the department detected Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) during routine testing.

“Both farms were placed under quarantine immediately, and no birds are allowed to enter or leave the affected properties. There are around 1000 ostriches on both farms,” said Bronwynne Jooste, the spokesperson for Alan Winde, MEC of Economic Opportunities.

To ensure the accuracy of the first test, and because the ostriches are not showing any clinical signs of illness, vets continued their testing campaign. There have been no reported bird deaths in the area.

“At this stage, it appears that the incidence has been

confined to the two properties. Farms within 3km of the affected farms will be placed under quarantine and testing in the surrounding areas will continue,” said Jooste, adding that no decision to cull had been taken and discussions were continuing.

It is suspected wild birds are the source of the infection.

Since June there have been 13 outbreaks of the disease in Mpumalanga and Gauteng.

The outbreaks involved seven commercial chicken farms, two groups of backyard chickens, three sets of wild birds and one group of domestic geese.

In southern Africa, the H5N8 strain of the disease also affected the poultry industry in Zimbabwe. The agriculture department said this strain of the virus has so far shown no sign of being infectious to people.

“Ostrich and chicken meat on sale in retail outlets is safe for human consumption,” said Jooste.