

NO NEED TO SHUT POULTRY MARKETS, SAYS GOVT.

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Disaster and disaster management

The Centre on Monday asked State governments not to shut down poultry markets or restrict sale of eggs or broiler chicken meat in the wake of the avian influenza outbreak that has affected 10 States. There is no need to panic as there have never been any cases of bird flu being transmitted to humans in India, and there is no danger of such transmission if the meat is properly cooked, Animal Husbandry Minister Giriraj Singh told mediapersons.

The World Health Organization has said the virus will be destroyed if poultry products are cooked at 70 degrees Celsius or above.

Asserting that unfounded rumours about the safety of poultry products could have a devastating impact on the industry, and hurt thousands of small farmers, Mr. Singh appealed to States not to take drastic action without scientific evidence.

The Minister specifically appealed to the Delhi government to reconsider its decision to shut Ghazipur mandi, Asia's largest wholesale market for chicken, and said he had written to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on the issue. There is also no evidence that restricting inter and intra-State movement of poultry products is necessary, he added. So far, five States, including Delhi, have issued such restrictive orders. Since January 3, when the current avian flu outbreak began, ex-farm gate prices of broiler chicken have fallen from a national average of Rs. 85-90 per kg to Rs. 55 per kg, according to Gulrez Alam, a director of the Indian Broiler Group. Sales have dropped 50%, he added.

Mr. Singh noted that maize, which was selling at Rs. 1,800/quintal has now dropped to Rs. 1,100/quintal. Maize is used as feedstock for the poultry industry. In March, the sector already took a major hit from false rumours that COVID-19 could be spread by meat consumption, added the Minister.

On Monday, Delhi, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand joined the list of affected States, taking the total number to 10. Mr. Singh emphasised that positive samples have been officially confirmed in commercial poultry only in Kerala and Maharashtra, while the other States have only reported confirmed cases among migratory birds, wild fowl and crows. In Delhi, he said the closure of several parks where migratory birds had been found dead was a necessary move, although there was no need to close poultry markets.

In his meeting with Chief Ministers, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also encouraged unaffected States to keep a constant vigil.

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