

Please find the attached documents from NADRO regarding the testing of raw milk used in the production of raw milk cheese. Developed in collaboration with USDA, FDA, NASDA, and state partners, the handout shares best practices and resources to support raw milk cheese processors during the ongoing HPAI outbreak in dairy cattle.

This document was not created by MDARD, but by the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA).

National Association of Dairy Regulatory Officials



RAW MILK CHEESE FINISHED PRODUCT TESTING

Last Updated: May 1, 2025

Processors seeking to voluntarily test finished product for highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 (HPAI) can contact Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine Animal Health Diagnostic Center (AHDC). Processors can contact Kristen Eiklor at crt-ahdc@cornell.edu to set up an AHDC client account and receive instructions on how to place an electronic submission through the Animal Health Diagnostic Lab portal.

Costs to Sample Finished Product:

1. Accession (Administrative) fee: \$8.00. This is a one-time fee charged per accession independent of the number of samples submitted.
2. RT-PCR¹ (pan-influenza A Matrix): \$41 per cheese sample. Each cheese block/lot submitted will be processed as an individual sample and the test charge will apply.
3. RT-PCR (H5-specific): \$41 per cheese sample. This testing is only performed if the pan-influenza A Matrix PCR test is positive.
4. Virus isolation: \$83.25 per cheese sample. This testing is only performed if the pan-influenza A Matrix PCR test is positive and is conducted in embryonated chicken eggs to determine virus infectivity. This will detect if there is infectious virus in the product.
5. Whole genome sequencing: \$250 per cheese sample. Only performed if requested by the processor for further epidemiological investigation.

Please note, to the best of NADRO's understanding, to-date HPAI has not been declared an adulterant in finished product by federal agencies.

¹ A PCR test shows if there is genetic material or DNA of the virus in the raw milk cheese. Virus isolation determines if the virus is still active.

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RESOURCES FOR RAW MILK CHEESE PROCESSORS DURING THE HIGHLY PATHOGENIC AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAK IN DAIRY CATTLE

The National Association of Dairy Regulatory Officials (NADRO) – in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), and state partners – is sharing some best practices and resources that may help raw milk cheese processors to facilitate the early detection of potential highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 virus (HPAI). This follows the release of [preliminary results](#) of research conducted by Cornell University, commissioned by the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and FDA, which suggest that HPAI may survive the 60-day aging process in some varieties of raw milk cheese that is made with raw milk containing HPAI.

I. BEST PRODUCTION PRACTICES FOR AGED RAW MILK CHEESE PROCESSORS

NADRO, USDA, FDA, NASDA, and state partners recommend the following best practices:

- Dairy producers should monitor herds for H5N1 infection by enrolling in USDA or state testing programs.
- If a herd becomes infected with H5N1, dairy producers should segregate clinically ill cows from the rest of the milking herd.
- Dairy processors should not use milk from infected cows in the production of raw milk products, such as raw milk cheese.
- Heat treating (thermization) or pasteurization are both effective measures that inactivate HPAI. Research to date has demonstrated heating raw milk at 54°C (130°F) for at least 15 minutes or 60°C (140°F) for at least 10 seconds inactivates HPAI in raw milk.
- Dairy processors may wish to consider the value of tracking and documenting source milk and herd status along with time and temperature controls (if thermization is used) for each lot of finished product.

II. USDA PROGRAMS FOR MILK AND HERD TESTING

USDA offers several tools for dairy processors and producers to monitor the raw milk supply and/or health of their herds, including the National Milk Testing Strategy and the [Dairy Herd Status Program](#).

a. How To Enroll in the National Milk Testing Strategy

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Raw milk cheese processors may voluntarily enroll in USDA's National Milk Testing Strategy. The National Milk Testing Strategy facilitates comprehensive HPAI surveillance of the nation's milk supply and dairy herds. Enrolled raw milk cheese processors can have raw milk tested for the presence of HPAI prior to the aging process of cheese made from the milk. By testing the raw milk before commencing the aging processes, processors can quickly identify and remove affected milk from their supply, saving valuable time and resources.

Processors can enroll in the National Milk Testing Strategy by:

1. Contacting the [state dairy regulator](#);
2. Contacting the [state animal health official](#); or
3. Contacting the USDA [area veterinarian in charge](#).

Raw milk samples will be collected from processors monthly, or more frequently as determined by the state, at no cost to the processor. Samples will be shipped to the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories for initial testing. Non-negative results will be communicated back to the processor and additional follow-up testing will occur to confirm the presence of HPAI. Initial results are generally expected within seven to ten days.

More information on the National Milk Testing Strategy can be found [here](#).

b. How To Enroll in the Dairy Herd Status Program

Producers may enroll in USDA's Dairy Herd Status Program to monitor herd status. The Dairy Herd Status Program is a voluntary program that offers dairy producers the option to monitor their herds via weekly sampling of bulk milk tanks. Enrolled dairy producers agree to weekly milk testing of their herds at no cost to the producer. After three consecutive weeks of negative test results for HPAI at a National Animal Health Laboratory Network laboratory, herds receive "Monitored Unaffected" status. Continued weekly bulk tank sample testing with negative results and participation in the Dairy Herd Status Program allows herds to maintain the "Monitored Unaffected" status.

More information on the Dairy Herd Status Program can be found [here](#).

Additional Resources:

Additional USDA resources and support for dairy herd producers can be found [here](#).

Processors seeking to test finished product that may have been manufactured before the implementation of any raw milk surveillance efforts can visit [here](#).