

## **Not so bootiful now**

So, Bernard Matthews is personally devastated at the havoc to his turkey factories wrought by the H5N1 avian flu virus. He told the nation's media that there was nothing he could have done to have prevented the outbreak amongst his birds in Suffolk.

Well, far from cracking open the Kleenex and sobbing along with Bernard, we thought we'd be better employed pointing out that indeed there are many things that could have stopped this whole sorry saga.

Global, trans-boundary diseases require vectors (carriers) to spread them around the world. The vectors beloved of UK chief veterinary officers are wild birds which were promoted as the Suffolk case villains from early on. For Bernard Matthews though the vector turns out to be his international trade from Hungary where H5N1 was discovered earlier this year. So, prevention number one is not to indulge in international poultry production with attendant vehicle, people, stock and virus movements.

Number two, is to turn one's back on intensive poultry production – the horror of 160,000 turkeys in sheds on a Suffolk airfield. Increasingly across the globe it is intensive units which are going down with the H5N1 strain from Java to Hungary to France to the UK. Intensive birds are immune compromised, provide a perfect vehicle for virus cycling and mutation, and pose a serious threat as virus factories to the environment and other more sustainable poultry units.

For some time now we have argued that outdoor poultry such as organic and free range units should have access to preventive vaccination as a precaution against H5N1 avian flu. This Suffolk affair has shown that more than ever we need vaccination to protect such birds from the “filthy practices” of intensive production.

And we agree wholeheartedly with Philip Lymbery, Compassion in World Farming chief executive, when he says -"This avian flu outbreak underlines the need for a root and branch review of food policy in the UK and Europe. Intensive poultry production provides the ideal breeding ground for new and highly virulent strains of disease. It is vital that we learn the lesson from this incident that Britain's cheap food culture comes at too high a price for animal welfare and food integrity."