Taking a look at the history of the NPIP

By Andrew R. Rhorer
Special to Poultry Times

CONYERS, Ga. — The National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) was started in the early 1930's to coordinate state programs aimed at the elimination of pullorum disease from commercial poultry. Pulsum is a bacterial disease of poultry that is transmitted from a hen to her chicks via the egg. By testing adult birds and eliminating disease carriers from the breeding flock, commercial chicken and turkey producers have eliminated this costly disease.

Probably the greatest single factor which limited the early expansion of the poultry industry was the disease known as Bacterial White Diarrhea (BWD), caused by Salmonella pullorum. This disease, later called pullorum disease, was unbridled in poultry, and could cause upwards of 80 percent mortality in baby poultry. Poultrymen recognized that problem but were unable to combat it until the causative organism was discovered by Dr. Leo Rettger in 1899 and a diagnostic blood test was developed by Dr. F.S. Jones in 1913.

Since pullorum disease was found to be egg-transmitted, following these two discoveries, individual poultrymen started to test their birds for pullorum disease and eliminate the reactors from the breeding flocks. But the disease was so widespread; they soon realized that if they were to be successful, a widespread, coordinated effort would be necessary. A number of states started statewide pullorum testing programs in the early 1920's; and before long, a few breeding flocks were being identified as free of pullorum.

About this same time some of the early poultrymen started to exert a conscientious effort to improve the genetic production capabilities of their stock. Even though a thorough understanding of genetics was lacking, considerable improvement was made through trapnesting programs which identified superior individual birds. This would be expanded later to include individual male matings and family selection as tools to improve production potential.

In the early 1930's members of the poultry breeding and hatching industries, through the International Baby Chick Association (IBCA), started to recognize the advantage of a national program for the improvement of poultry. It was envisioned that such a program would utilize the good points of the individual state breeding and disease control programs and develop standard terminology which would be equally applicable in all areas of the country.

Finally, after a few years, several IBCA conventions, numerous committee meetings and countless hours of deliberations, the provisions for the first nationwide poultry improvement program were finalized in 1934. This program, which became operational July 1, 1935, was named the National Poultry Improvement Plan and was subsequently adopted by 47 states. The National Turkey Improvement Plan (NTIP) was activated on Sept. 25, 1943. On Dec. 3, 1971, the two plans were combined under one title, “the NPIP,” with separate provisions for egg-and meat-type breeding chickens in 1998.

The next modification point in the history of the NPIP was in the early 1990's with the development of the Global Market Plan. The poultry industry began to export large quantities of poultry genetic stock and poultry meat.

The major trading partners wanted assurances that the poultry and poultry products originated from breeding flocks free of avian influenza. Thus the establishment of the “U.S. Avian Influenza Clean” program for breeding chickens in 1998.

The latest modification point in the history of the NPIP took place in July 2004, in San Francisco, Calif., with the addition of commercial production poultry (table-egg layers, broilers and meat-turkeys) as a new part of the NPIP. The delegates of the 37th biennial conference of the NPIP approved a new HS/H7 Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza (LPAI) Monitored classification for table-egg layers, broilers and meat-turkeys.

Andrew R. Rhorer is senior coordinator for the National Poultry Improvement Plan with offices in Conyers, Ga.