

Synalaf
Syndicat National
des Labels Avicoles de France

Feedback from France:
HPAI & sheltering of free-range poultry

Benoit DROUIN, President of SYNALAF

- Introduction of SYNALAF
- Importance of free-range poultry production in France
- French Label Rouge and organic chickens: production standards and key strengths/sanitary aspects
- Prevalence of HPAI within the French Label Rouge and organic poultry sectors
- Evolution of sheltering measures for free-range chickens in France, considering the low prevalence
- Conclusion

Synalaf
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- Professional union dedicated to **defending** and **promoting Label Rouge** and **organic poultry** and **eggs,** established in 1967 (creation of Label Rouge in France in 1960).
- Represents **organized sectors**, not independent farmers
- Operates as an **interprofessional body**, **encompassing all links in the supply chain**: associations that hold the specifications, hatcheries, farmers, production organizations, feed manufacturers, slaughterhouses, and egg-packing centers.
- Representative for these sectors to both **French and European public authorities**.
- **Wide range of functions**: defense of the specificities of Label Rouge and organic in the Laws and Regulations, defense of the free-range production method, economic monitoring of production, monitoring of many technical subjects: animal welfare, environment, etc.; monitoring of Label Rouge production rules; monitoring of organic regulations; consultation of members on many subjects; communication/promotion, etc.

Importance of free-range poultry production in France

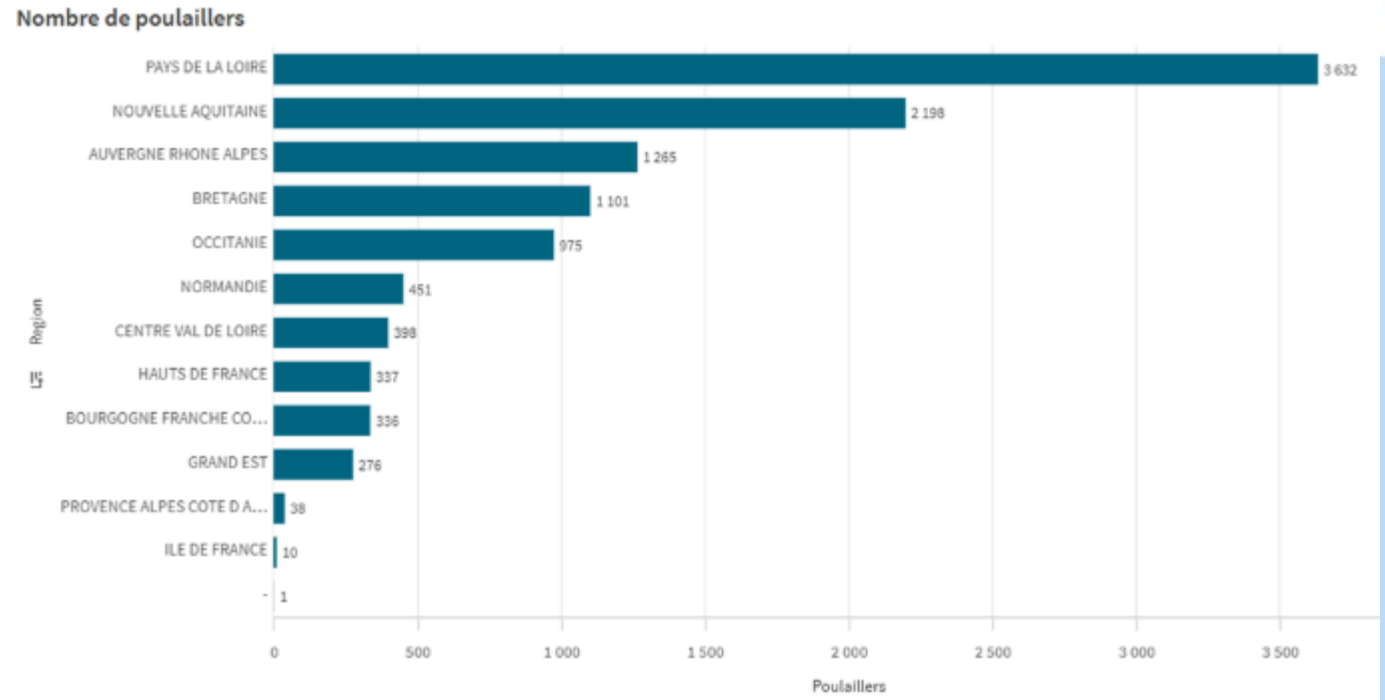


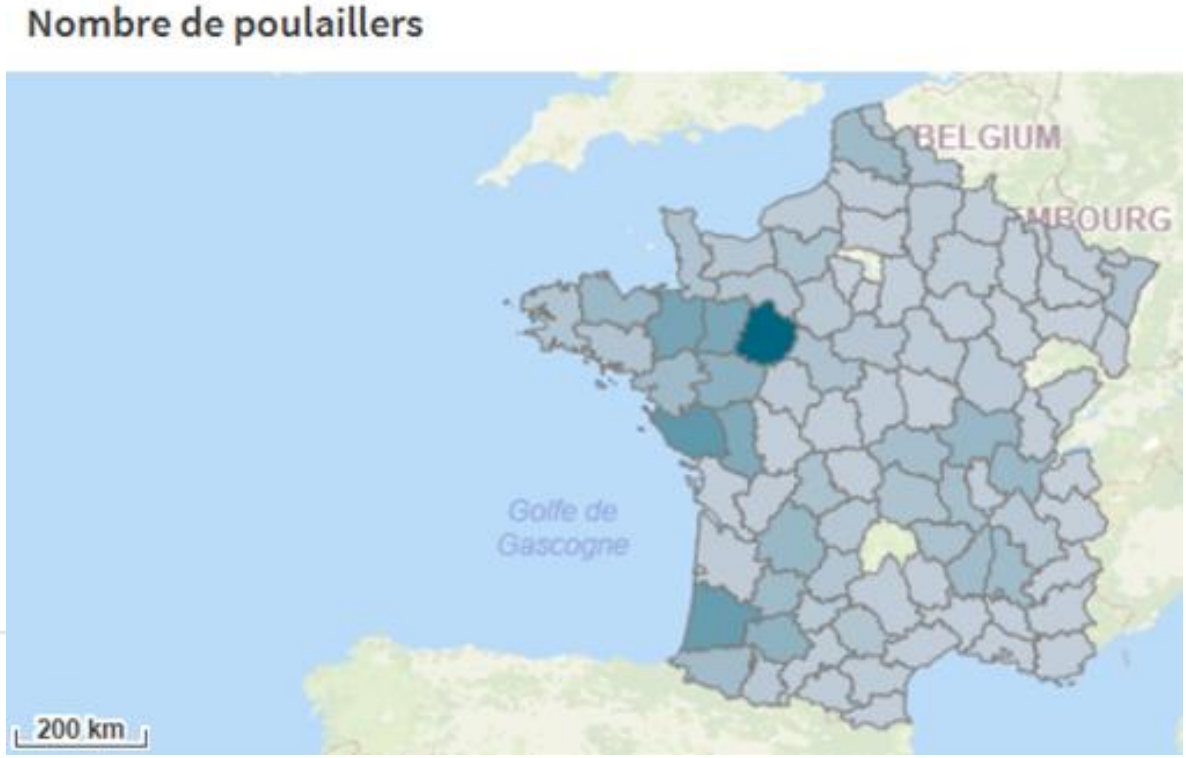
Poultry for meat in France

Free-range poultry accounts for approximately:

- **120 millions** birds/year
- **17%** of French production, including **15%** Label Rouge, **1%** organic, and other “traditionnal" (“fermier”)
- **5,000 farmers**—representing **50%** of all French meat-poultry farmers and **50%** of production sites
- Free-range poultry: **93%** are chickens, **5%** guinea fowl, and **0.2%** turkeys

Location of free-range poultry houses in France:





Layers in France

Free range = 24 millions/an ; **53%** of French production

Plein air hors Label rouge	Label Rouge	Bio
15 516 097	2 460 994	6 343 322
33,6 %	5,3 %	13,7 %

Cage aménagée	Sol
10 282 689	11 649 611
22,2 %	25,2 %

Source : BD Avicole – [T1]

CHEPTEL EN PLACE AU 01/07/26

46,3 millions de pondeuses en place

-0,9 % vs Avr. 26

BRETAGNE

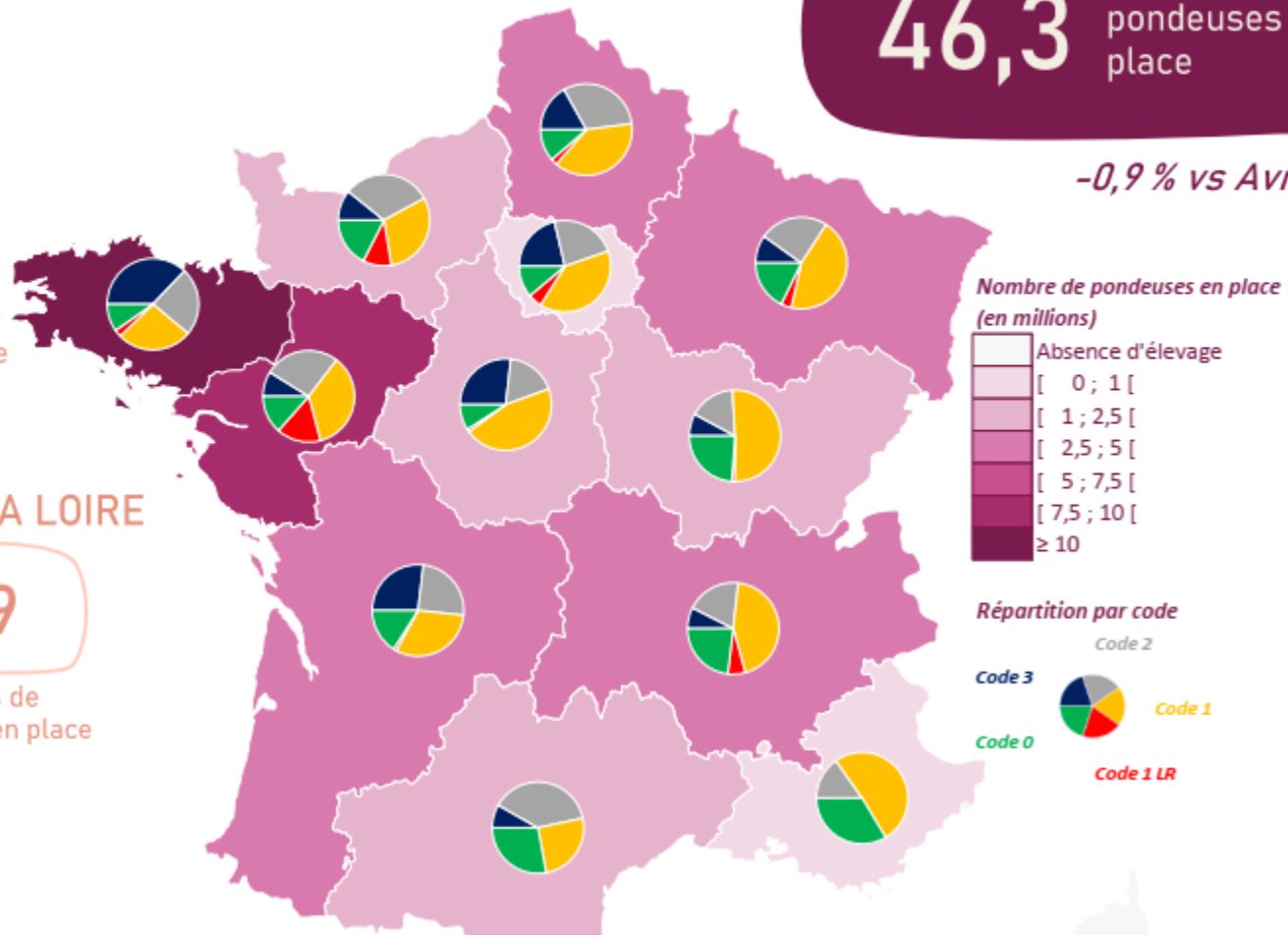
17,0

millions de pondeuses en place

PAYS DE LA LOIRE

8,9

millions de pondeuses en place



Ducks for foie gras in France

31 million ducks raised for foie gras in France,
with approximately **30 million** of these raised outdoors



French Label Rouge/organic chickens: production rules and key strengths/sanitary aspects



Highly regulated extensive production methods

	« Traditional free range »	
	Label Rouge	Organic (in France)
Strain	Rustic slow growing	
Stocking density maxi	Low: 11 chickens/m^2	Low: 10 chickens/m^2
Number maxi/building	4 400 chickens	4 800 chickens
Surface max/building	400 m^2	480 m^2
Ventilation	Static ventilation	
Number of building/site	4 buildings max	
Age of access to outdoors	6 weeks at the latest	
Mini age of slaughter	81 days	
Control on farm by a certified body	1/flock	
Control of biosecurity	Biosecurity audit « pulse » annual or biennial	


4 buildings/site
Small buildings: 400 m² max, 4400 birds max/building



Access to large meadows with vegetation and trees from 6 weeks (age)
Importance of vegetation in encouraging chickens to go outside



A low stocking density in barns: 11 birds max/m²

No dynamic ventilation



Production criteria and organizational structure that help limit the introduction and spread of the virus

- Limitation on the number of buildings/site, building size, and indoor stocking density = **lower concentration** of livestock and **lower density** within the buildings
- Single-batch rearing per building, using an "all-in/all-out" system, **no multi-age**
- **Single species** per building, no mixing of species
- **No dynamic ventilation**
- Poultry are sent exclusively to the slaughterhouse : **no transport to other farms**
- **No external teams entering** the facility while a batch is being reared
- Low mortality rate ⇨ **collection of carcasses only during the sanitary downtime**
- **Long sanitary downtime** of at least 14 days
- Potential relative resilience of **slow-growing and rustic breeds?**
- Implementation of **biosecurity measures**, with annual or biennial audits for verification

Prevalence of HPAI in French Label Rouge and organic production sectors



Registration of HPAI cases in free-range poultry in France conducted by SYNALAF (not carried out by the French administration or ANSES (sanitary agency)!)

⇨ Findings:

- ✓ In France, Label Rouge and organic poultry farms are **very rarely the source of "primary cases"** compared to other types of poultry production, and **they have never been the origin of an epizootic outbreak.**
- ✓ Like other types of poultry, they have been affected in areas experiencing epizootics when the surrounding environment was heavily contaminated.

In summary: prevalence of HPAI in Label Rouge or organic chicken flocks with a real access to an outdoor range, since 2021

- 1,6% in 2025/2026
- 0% in 2024/2025
- 0% in 2023/2024
- 1% in 2023/2022
- 5% in 2022/2021

Free-range/organic poultry represent 12.1% of the total poultry population in France in terms of bird numbers, and approximately 50% of the farms raising poultry for meat.

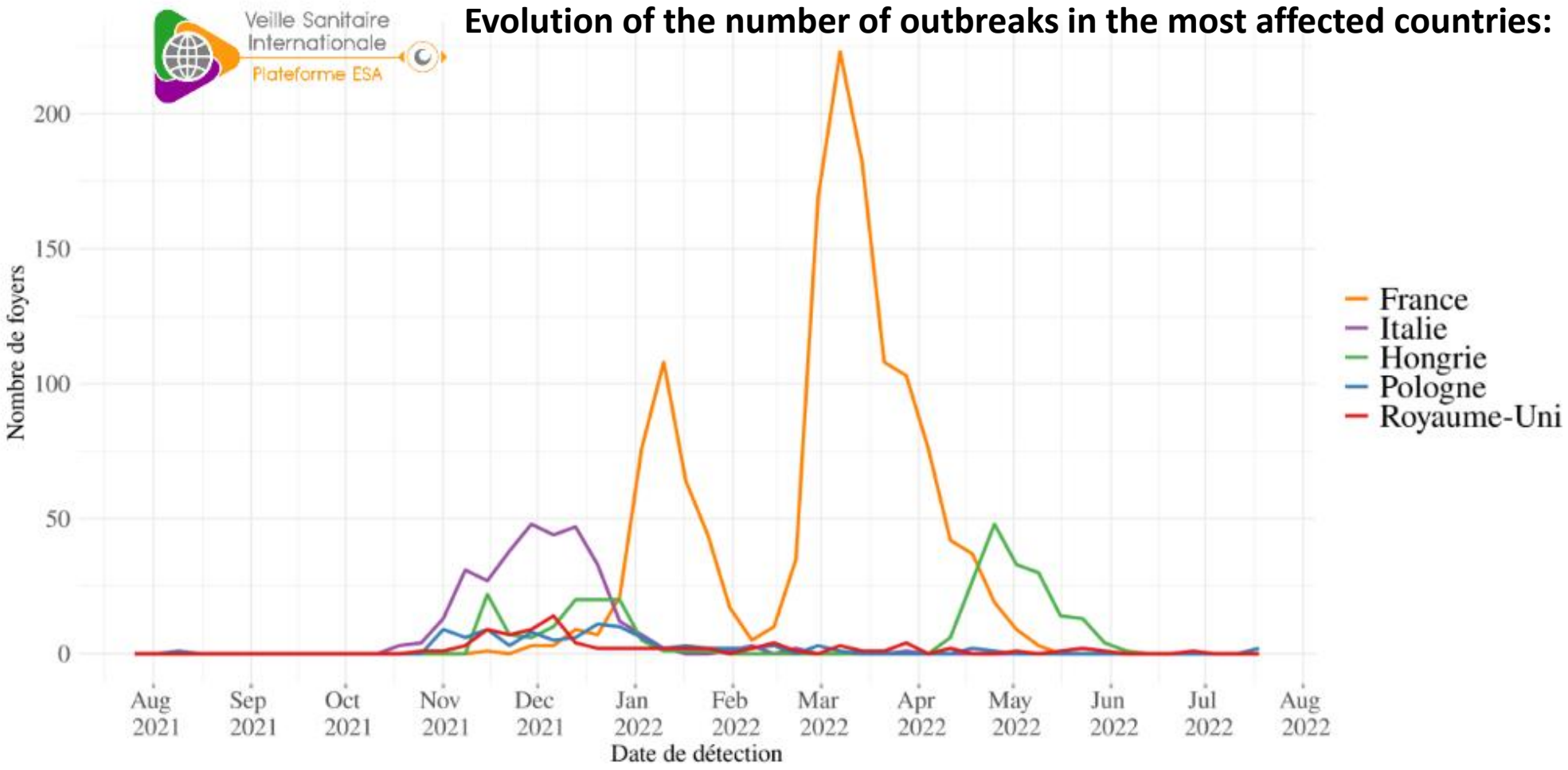
⇨ **Clear underrepresentation of Label Rouge/organic poultry with access to the outdoors, relative to their percentage within the French poultry population**

⇨ 3 exemples since 2021:

1 Example of South Ouest – 2021/22

- France, the worst-affected country in Europe: 1,378 farm outbreaks

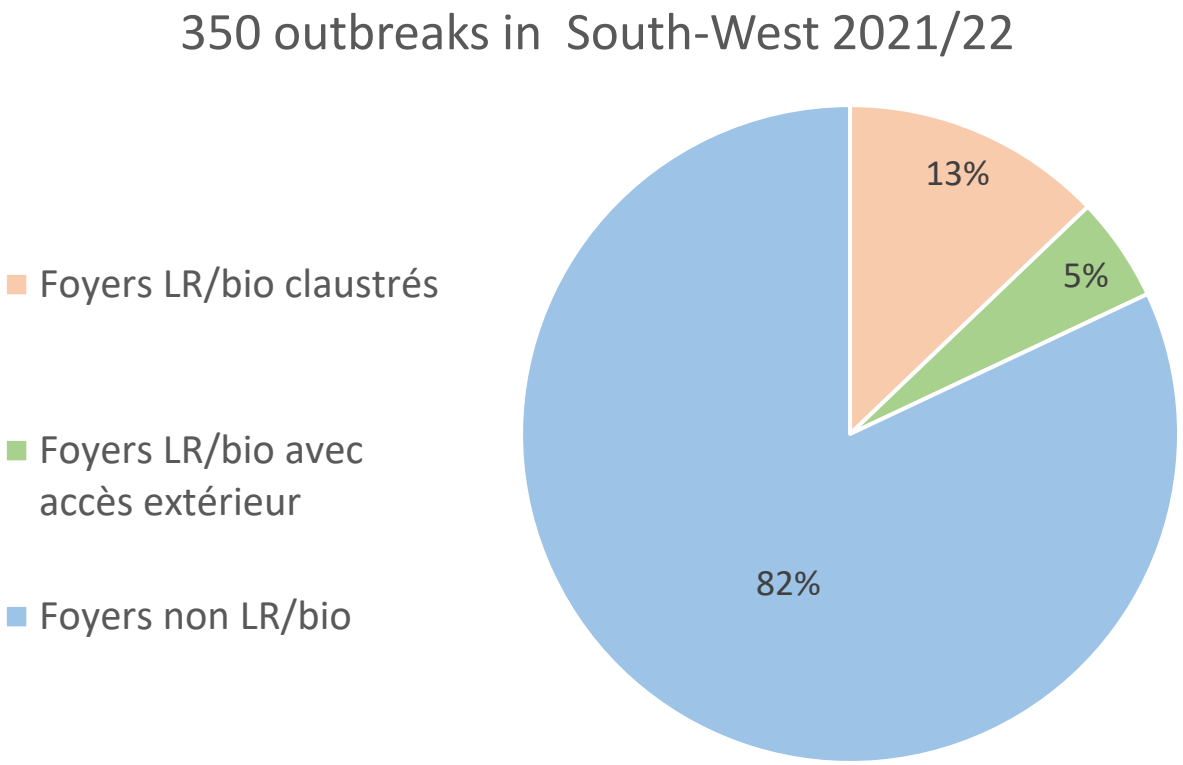
Evolution of the number of outbreaks in the most affected countries:



One affected region: the South-West



- Free-range/organic chickens represent a large share ≈ **55%** of production in the South-West
- The vast majority (80%) had access to a limited outdoor area (0.5 m²/bird), while 20% were entirely indoors ⇨ ≈ **44%** of the total poultry population consisted of free-range/organic chickens with outdoor access



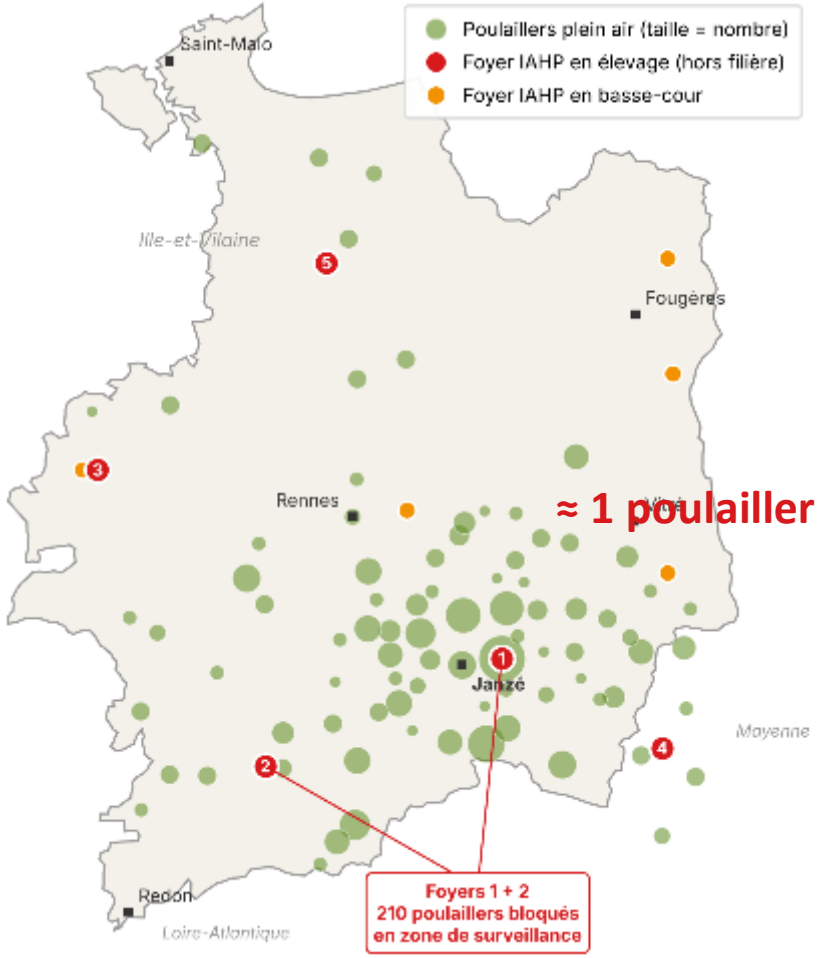
- 350 outbreaks in SW
- Prévalence HPAI: only **5%** of the outbreaks in the SW with access to the outdoors

= Under-representation of Label Rouge /organic chicken flocks with outdoor access, relative to their significant presence in the area

2 Example Janzé (Bretagne) – 2022

Free-range Label Rouge farms located in the heart of an area affected by HPAI





≈ 1 poulailler sur

410 Label Rouge poultry houses with free range

Outbreaks (no LR/organic outdoors)

1. **19/03/22 Essé**
   ducks
2. **27/03/22 Guipry**
   Ducks breeders

→ **210 in ZS (10 km)**

3. **08 et 12/09/22 St-Onen-la-Chapelle** → **3 in ZS**
   Ducks ; gallus breeders
4. **08/11/22 St-Aignan-sur-Roë** → **18 in ZS**
   Organic chickens indoor

= 241 in ZS (10 km)

≈ 1 building/2

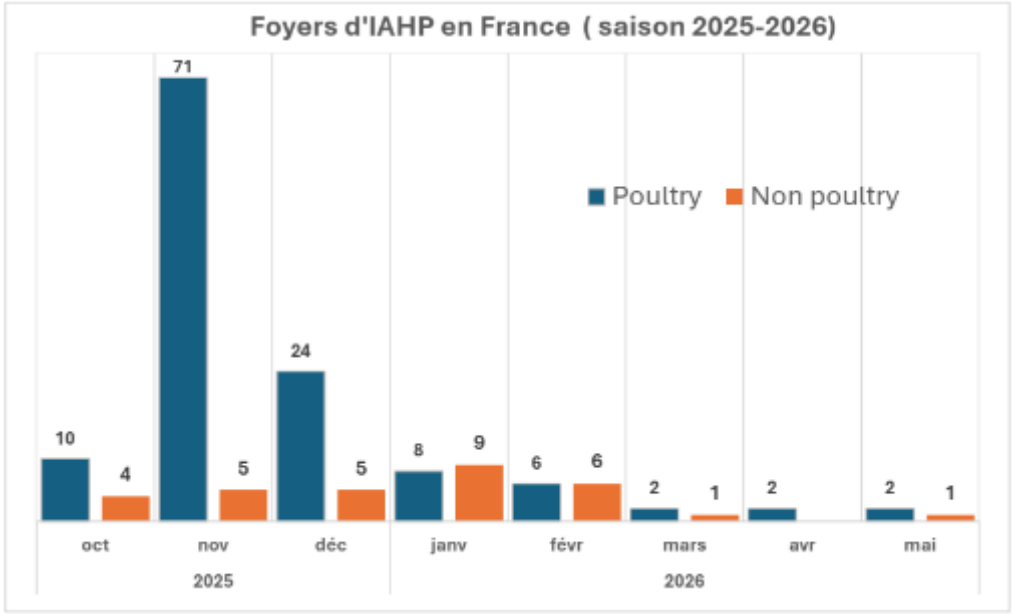
Viral pressure around

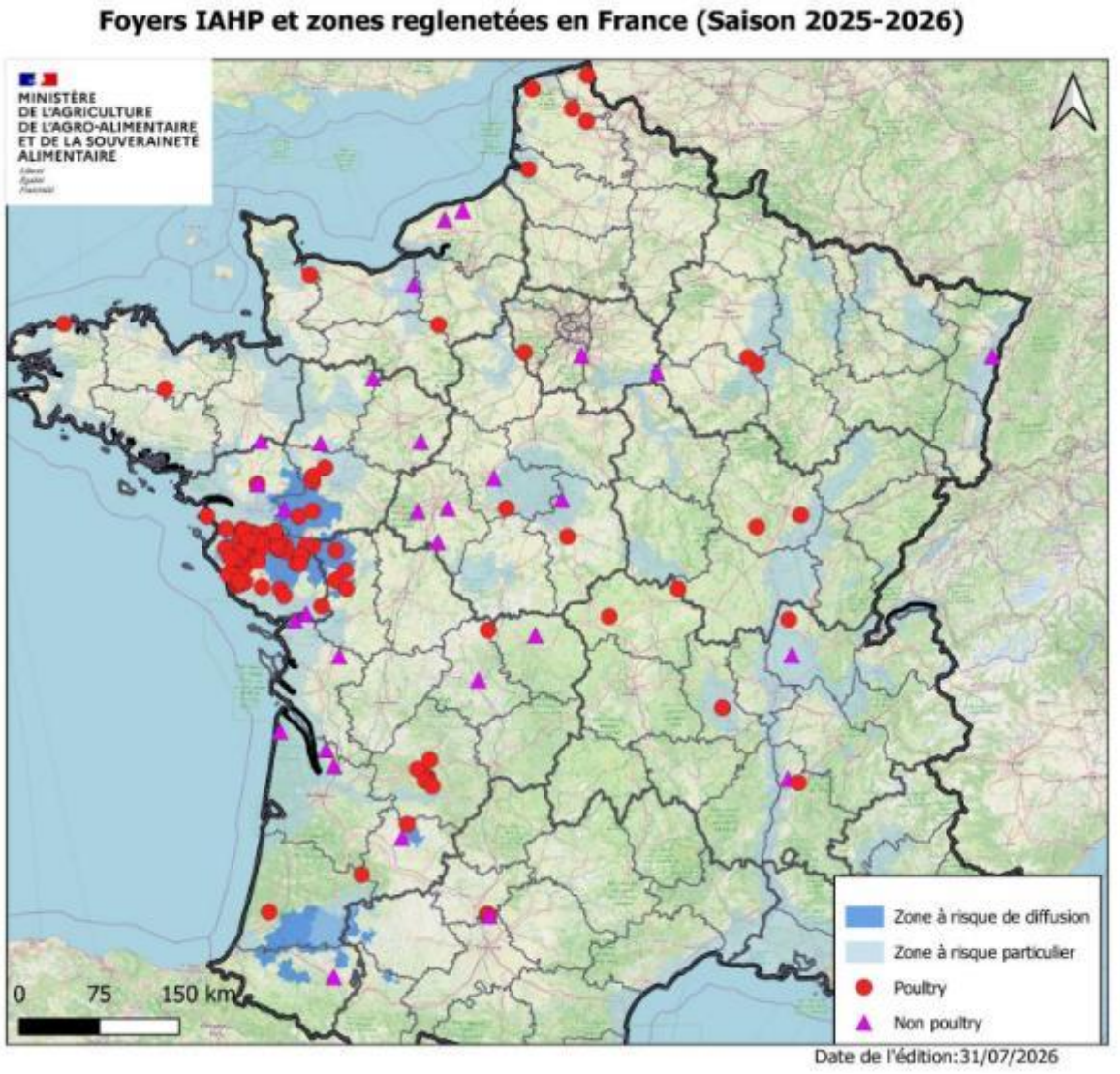
- **5 outbreaks in backyards**
  St-Onen · Cesson-Sévigné · Luitré · Argentré-du-Plessis · Landéan (2022-23)
  + many cases in wild birds

⇨ **No cases have occurred in any of the free-range farms within this production area, despite high viral pressure in the region, high stocking density, and the fact that the poultry are kept outdoors.**

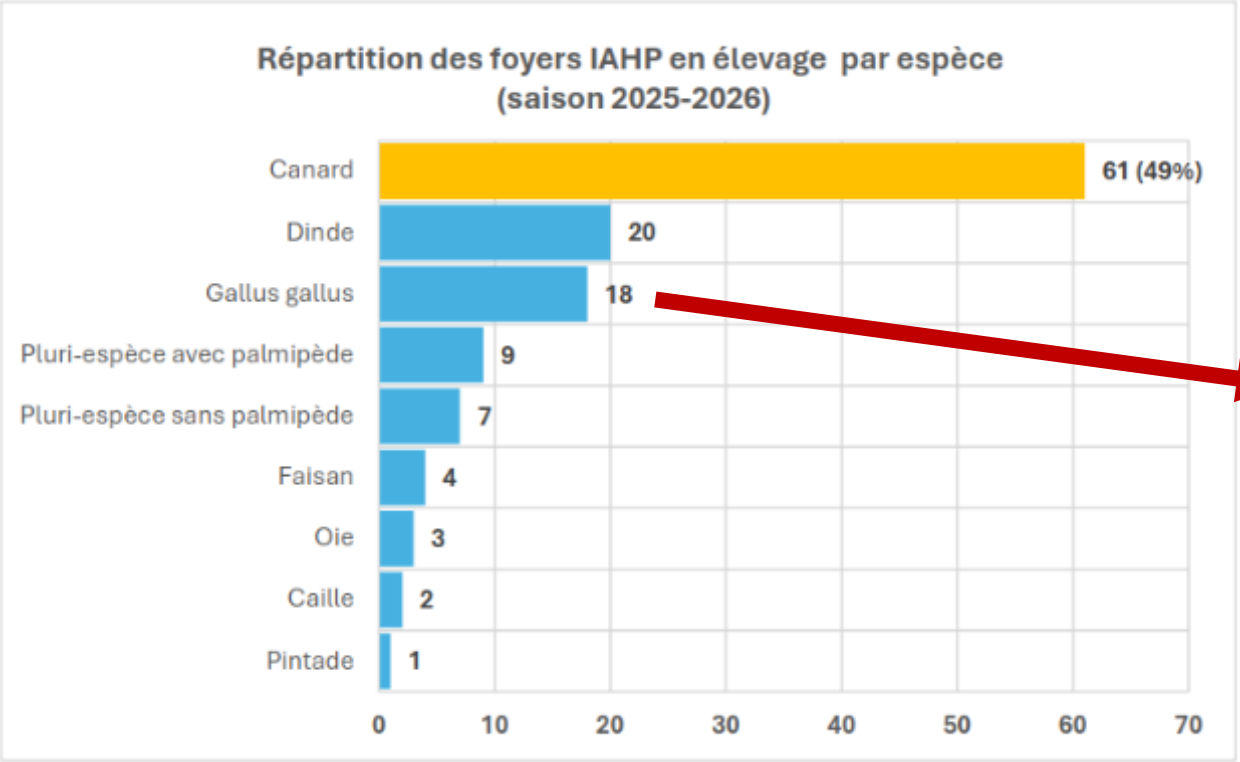
3 Example of season 2025-26

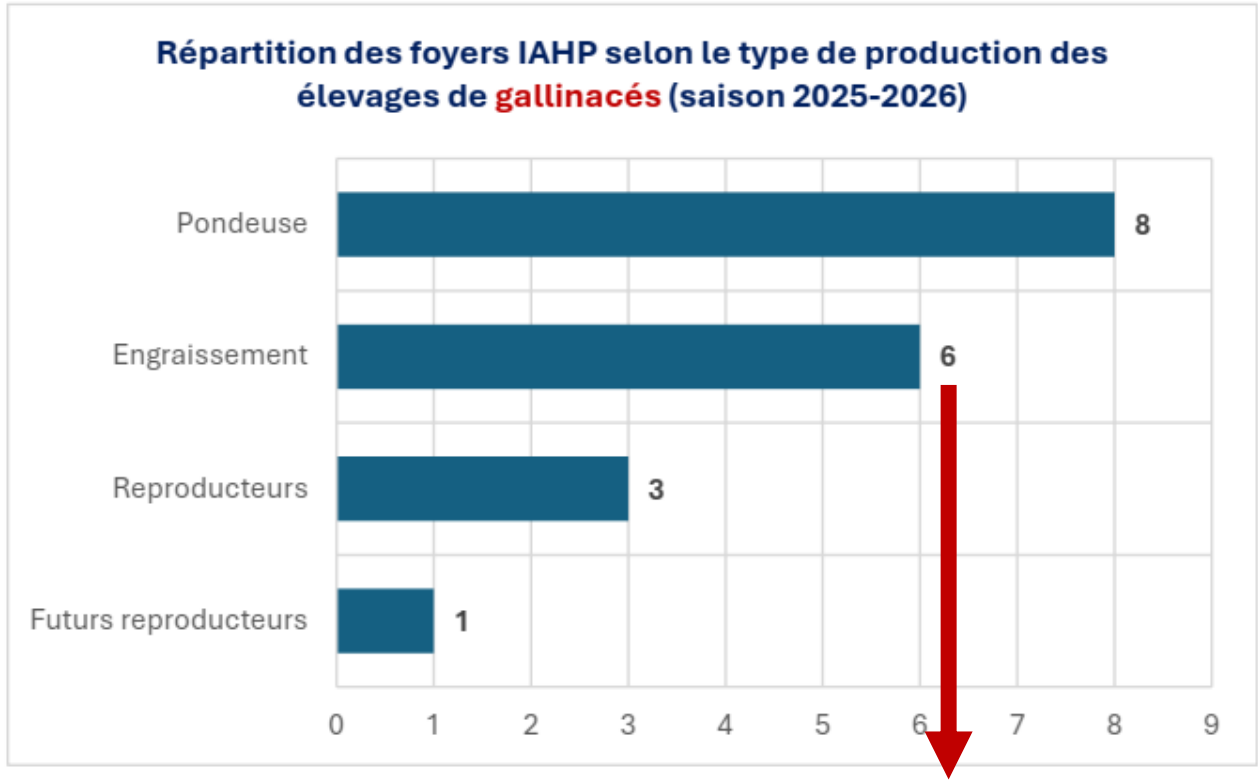
- Duck vaccination
- 125 poultry farm outbreaks in France
- 67% in the Pays de la Loire region





Species affected:





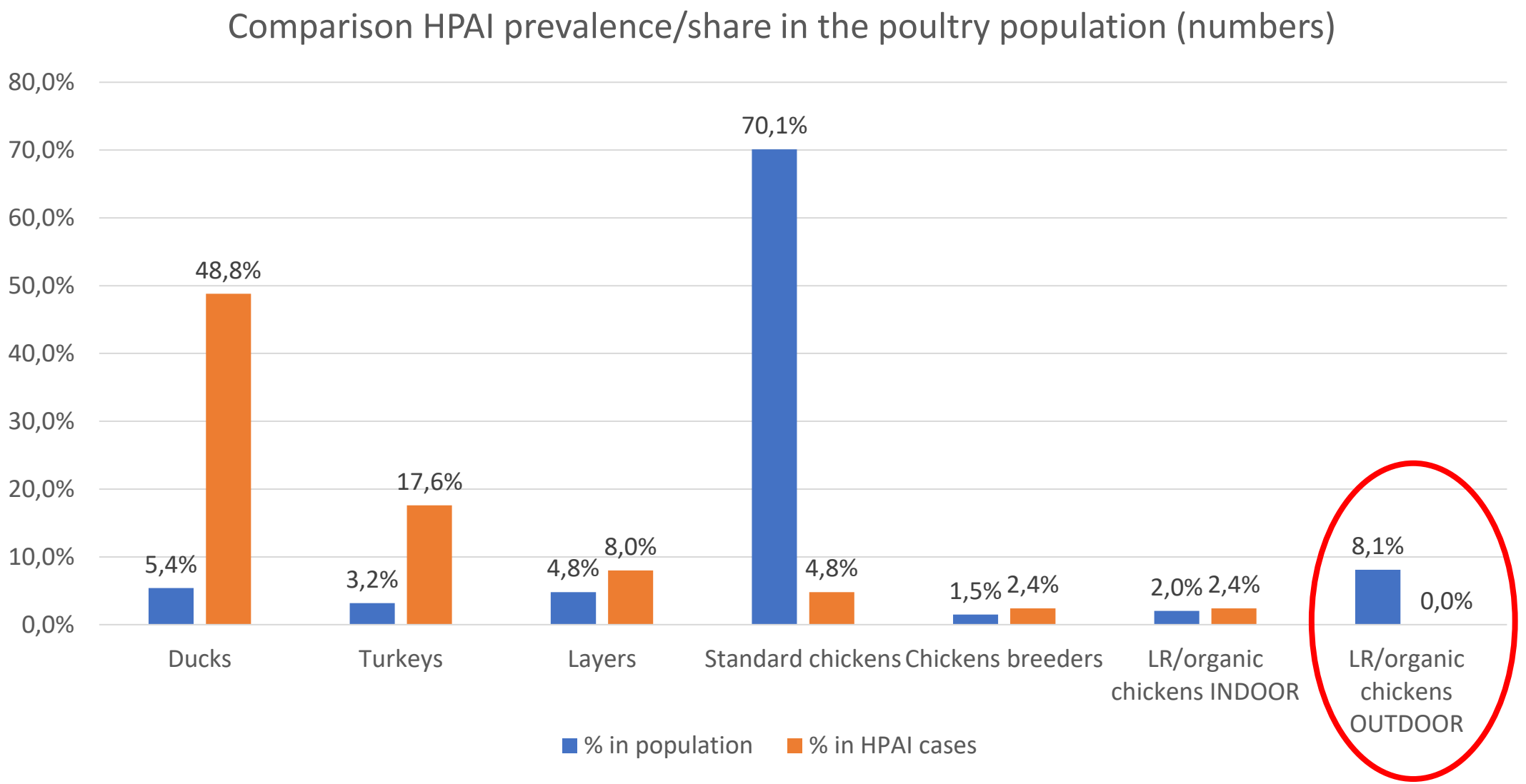
3 cases: standard chickens

3 cases: LR chickens **indoor**

0% of cases for Label Rouge/organic chickens with outdoor access even though these categories account for **≈8.1%** of the total poultry population in France

⇨ **Label Rouge/organic chickens with access to the outdoors are underrepresented among the cases**

Comparison of the share of poultry types within the population (in terms of numbers) and their HPAI prevalence rates *(source: SYNALAF)*:



Evolution of measures for free-range chickens in France, linked to the low prevalence



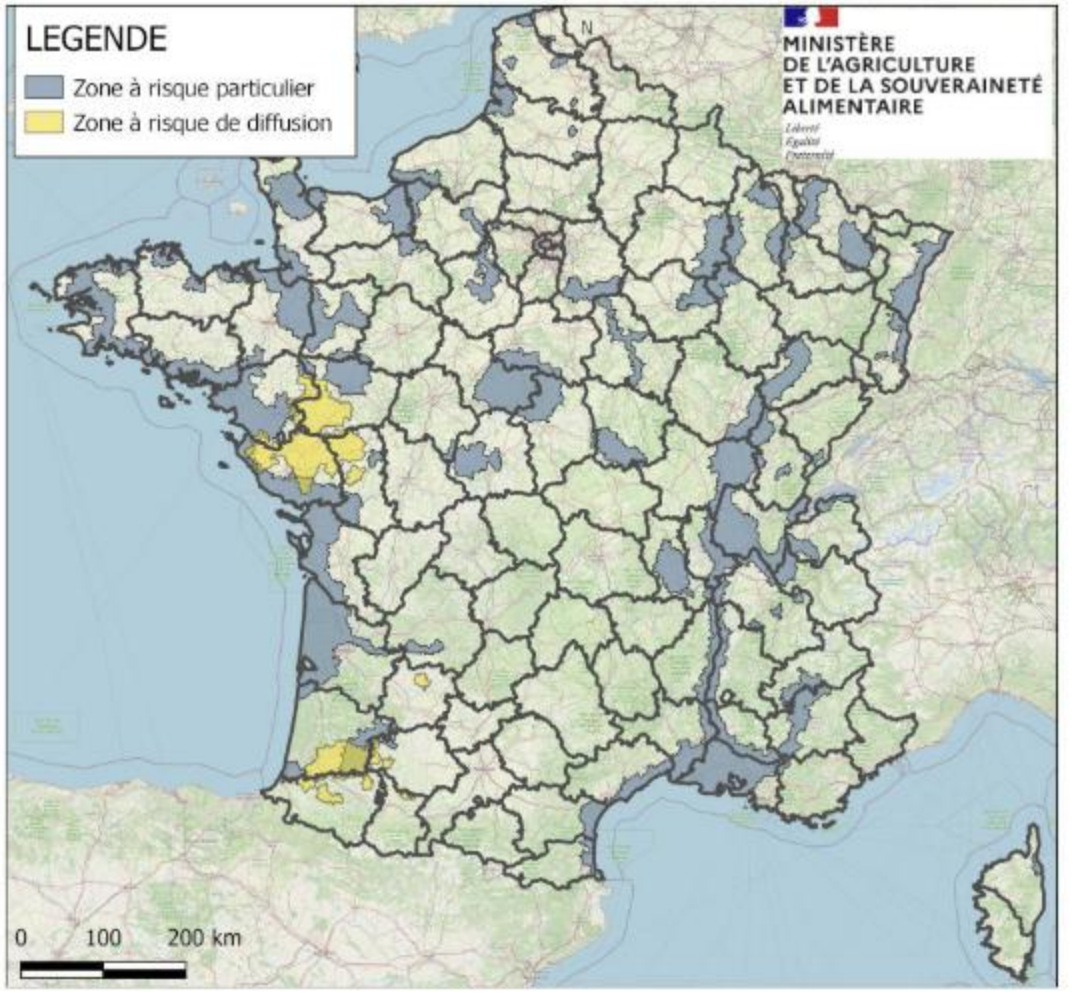
The basis of the French system for implementing measures/HPAI: risk levels and zones

ZRP (Wetlands): area where natural features—such as wetlands or migration corridors—increase the risk of contact with wild birlds

ZRD (Spread-Risk Area): area with a high concentration of poultry farms, which facilitates the rapid transmission of disease from one farm to another.

Risk level	ZRP (wetlands)	ZRD (high density of farms)	Others
Negligible	No sheltering measures		
Moderate	**Sheltering measures**	No sheltering measures	
High	**Sheltering measures**		

IAHP : zones à risque particulier (ZRP) et à risque de diffusion (ZRD) en



Evolution of regulations/sheltering to adapt to the farming model and facilitated by a low prevalence rate

2007-2021

Outdoor permitted **in the event of welfare** concerns, subject **to veterinary approval**

2021

Access to outdoor permitted **from 10 weeks of age,** in a restricted area (0.5 m²/bird), **subject to veterinary approval**

2022

Elimination of the requirement for veterinary validation

Access to outdoors permitted **from 10 weeks of age**, in a restricted area (0.5 m² per bird), **following a favorable biosecurity audit.**

2023

Lowering the age of access to outdoor:

Access to the outdoors permitted **from 8 weeks of age**, in a restricted area (0.5 m²/bird), **following a favorable biosecurity audit**.

2026

No more size limits for outdoor areas:

Access to the outdoors permitted **from 8 weeks of age, on an adapted area (with no size restrictions), following a successful biosecurity audit and preliminary veterinary approval**.

Conclusion



Stop the stigmatization of free-range poultry!
Stop trying to confine them or keep them under netting!

- These French data show **that outdoor access is not a greater risk factor than others, and production of Label Rouge/organic free-range chickens even provide protective factors/primary introduction.**
- It is essential to implement **robust biosecurity measures across all farms** and for all personnel ⇨ ERPA biosecurity fact sheets.
- **Other risk factors are more important**: failure to apply biosecurity, proximity to water sources, proximity to ducks, thinning, multi-species and multi-age sites without sanitary downtime, species more susceptible to the virus: ducks, turkeys, layers, density, etc.
- There is a need for more data regarding these types of production, as well as greater recognition and consideration of these issues by EU scientific authorities and administrative bodies.

Recommended biosecurity measures for rural poultry

Manage your production units

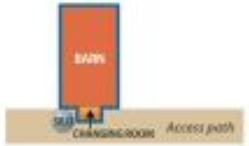
You must manage your farm with production units (PU) that are sanitarily independent.
Each PU :
- must be physically limited by walls for barns and nettings for ranging areas
- must contain only one type of poultry : palmipeds or gallinaceans
- should only contain poultry of the same age
- must have a changing room in good shape, which allows the independent sanitary management of the PU.

Examples of production units (PU) :

Farm with open air area
PU = changing room + barn + ranging area



Early rearing farm
PU = changing room + barn



In the case of a barn with several pens
PU = changing room + barn (pens and corridor)



Delimitation of the PU zone.

Separate poultry species

Palmipeds (ducks, geese) and gallinaceans (chickens, guinea fowls, turkeys) must not be reared in the same production units.

They must not come into contact with each other because they don't react in the same way with the avian influenza virus.



Protect feed and water

If you have a free-range farming system, the ranging areas must not have water or feed points because that could attract wild birds.

ERPA recommends to feed and water only inside the buildings. If impossible, protect these water/feed points from wild birds with a roof and netting.



Protect your poultry

In case of an important risk of introduction of avian influenza by wild birds, it is recommended to keep the poultry inside the building (if animal welfare allows it), or to reduce the size of the ranging area (water points must be excluded from the ranging area).

It is important to follow the recommendations of your veterinary authorities on the most appropriate approach for your case.



For any information : contact@erpa-ruralpoultry.eu

Recommended biosecurity measures for rural poultry

Pay attention to visitors' entrances/exits



Your farm must have a clear border that customers or other visitors should not cross.
No visitors or other people who are not essential to the farm should enter the production unit.
The use of chains and warning signs is highly recommended.
In case an outside person has to enter the production unit, it is imperative to use the changing room following the protocol described below.

The steps to use the changing room

Use of the changing room TO ENTER the production unit :



Use of the changing room TO EXIT from the production unit :



1. **In the external zone :**
   Take off your shoes and clothes.
   Place the feet only in the inner zone or on a slatted floor, e.g. by pivoting on the separation bench or passing over the separation board.
2. **In the inner zone :**
   Wash hands with soap or hydro-alcohol gel.
3. Put on the outfit and shoes specific to the production unit, put a hair-net on top of the hair.
4. **In the inner zone :**
   Remove clothing and shoes specific to the production unit and take the hair-net off.
5. **In the inner zone :**
   Wash hands with soap or hydro-alcohol gel.
6. Pivot on the separation bench or pass over the separation board, then, **in the inner zone**, put on your clothes and shoes.

Example of changing room :



Apply a waiting period

Between the depletion of a flock and the placement of a new one, you must wait for a period of time called "waiting period" that begins after cleaning and disinfection of the houses.

ERPA advises **a period of 15 days on average**, the houses must be completely dry before the placement of a new house.
This recommendation cannot replace the official regulation that applies in your country.



Avec la collaboration de ITAVI
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