

# Georgia

## Partnerships for Livestock Environmental Management Systems

Georgia's poultry industry represents over 50% of total farm cash receipts, contributing more than \$13 billion to the state's economy. Georgia is the top poultry producing state in the U.S., producing 24.6 million lbs of chicken meat, 8.2 million table eggs & 5.7 million hatching eggs. The industry is based on the integrator/contract grower model in which integrators mandate many management decisions and farmers rely on the company for major inputs. Nutrient management has been a major focus of education and technical assistance for several years, and recently, growers have come under NPDES and State regulation requiring a nutrient management plan. Urban encroachment, other regulatory changes and the public's environmental awareness have also necessitated changes in the industry. The need for farmers to document their practices and stewardship efforts is higher than ever.

In developing its pilot project on environmental management systems for poultry growers, the Georgia project team relied heavily on stakeholders recruited from government agencies, poultry companies and commodity associations who were already involved in ongoing agricultural environmental efforts. A core group included the Georgia Poultry Federation, U.S. Poultry and Egg, and Georgia Department of Agriculture. Gold Kist Farms, a large poultry integrator, was the major industry representative. They contributed to the planning process and provided supplemental financial support. Secondary stakeholders included Georgia Environmental Protection Division, Georgia Farm Bureau, AgGeorgia Farm Credit, and the Georgia Pollution Prevention Assistance Division.

Throughout the project the EMS team worked closely with a variety of growers, ranging from two-house part-time farms to multi-house operations with other major crops and livestock production. Volunteer growers were recruited primarily with the help of Gold Kist, although a small number replied to an article in the UGA Poultry Science Department's Grower Newsletter.

### Project Objectives

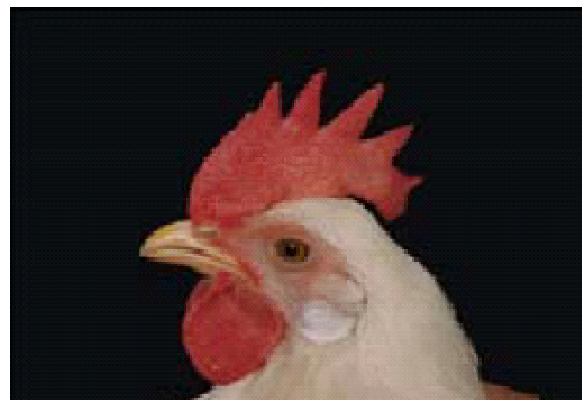
As part of its objectives for the project, the pilot team aimed to assess the impacts of policy

### Benefits of EMS....

A Georgia poultry producer working with our project stated that he gained a better understanding of nutrient management planning, and how the EMS could tie that in with other stewardship practices. He plans to implement his EMS, and said it could potentially have a positive impact on neighbor relations and runoff problems, and improve his efficiency.

incentives or sanctions, educational strategies, training and support materials as well as farmer background and attitudes on farmers' commitment to environmental management systems for their farms. The Georgia Poultry EMS Pilot tested three different methods of developing EMSs on farms. Options included a self-guided procedure, extension-specialist-led and consultant-conducted. Two consulting firms each worked with a different farm to develop EMSs.

Assessment tools used by producers in developing EMSs included the On Farm Assessment and Environmental Review Program (OFAER), State



*Litter from poultry houses, commonly consisting of wood shavings and manure, are typically applied to pastures and hayfields on neighboring farms.*

and National Farm\**A*\*Syst assessments, the Georgia poultry self assessment guide developed as part of this project, NRCS conservation planning resources, and farm family/employee brainstorming. Extension specialist-conducted and Farm\**A*\*Syst assessments were the most popular choice. At least two farmers had Environmental Management Solutions, LLC's OFAER review. Few participating producers chose to use the independent self assessment tool, although both consultants indicated that they used these tools in their EMS development process with farmers.

Table 1. Producer Involvement

Group	Number of Producers		% retention
	Initial	Final	
Self	8	5	62
Extension	12	10	83
Consultant	3	2	67

**Lessons Learned**

- ✓ Time and complexity of materials were two barriers to EMS development cited by farmers. EMSs are likely to work best for growers already involved in other management programs such as accounting, precision agriculture and formal employee training.
- ✓ Growers' perceived benefits included: organizing regulatory requirements, improving efficiency; and having documentation to prove environmental compliance.
- ✓ Farmers were very interested in developing a farm and family specific environmental policy. Growers made efforts to develop a statement regarding their efforts to produce a quality product while preventing pollution, striving for continual improvement and defining a stewardship ethic. Some saw benefits for themselves, and others recognized this was valuable for communicating with employees and communities.
- ✓ The assessment process was also fruitful. Growers identified concerns on their own, including some not previously considered by the project team. Issues included: nutrient management, regulatory compliance, adherence

to permit conditions and integrator mandates, petroleum storage and handling, dust and odor, pest management and pesticide use, emergency planning and noise pollution.

**Big Picture Summary**

Through this project we learned that it would be difficult to implement EMSs on a widespread basis in Georgia. Of the three groups the self-led group had the greatest difficulty in understanding and creating an EMS. Results from the Extension-led group were quite satisfactory and participants were very involved in the process. The consultants' products were outstanding, although probably cost prohibitive to develop for most GA poultry farms.

Improved tools, better incentives, and one-on-one technical assistance will be required to encourage participation. If these barriers can be overcome, environmental benefits and improved management may be realized through EMS adoption. Further efforts should focus on building assistance capacity, and working with cutting edge producers likely to voluntarily adopt EMS principles.

One producer felt the EMS procedures were too time consuming but did see the usefulness of the paper trail if he had to demonstrate his efforts or were ever involved in a lawsuit as a result of his farming and environmental practices. Another producer indicated that this project made him more aware of weak points and that while he had been heading in the right direction, the project pulled his ideas into one plan that he could then begin to implement.

Our team plans to continue to refine EMS tools for producers and coaches who can assist in EMS development. We also plan to work with our State Pollution Prevention Assistance Division to incorporate EMS principles into a newly created agricultural recognition program. Hopefully, by working with environmentally proactive producers, we can show outside stakeholders and other producers the benefits of this approach and allow additional incentives to develop in the future.

