

Pennsylvania

Partnerships for Livestock Environmental Management Systems

The poultry industry in Pennsylvania accounts for almost \$700 million in annual income at the farm level, making it the second largest agricultural industry in the state (behind the dairy industry). A cooperative effort in Pennsylvania has investigated how the EMS approach to natural resource protection might apply to the state's diverse poultry industry. PennAg Industries Association and Penn State University combined forces to develop an environmental assessment tool for the state's broiler, turkey and layer industries. With the assistance of a diverse and knowledgeable stakeholder group we tailored the environmental assessment tool for poultry farms. The evaluation process included a pilot assessment of the tool's strengths and weaknesses in supporting voluntary actions to reduce environmental risk.

The Pennsylvania Poultry assessment tool was an on-site evaluation of poultry farms for potential water quality, odor and other environmental impacts. It identified specific actions to reduce those potential impacts.

This project was guided by input from our stakeholder group of representatives from Flintrock Farms, Wenger's Feed Mill, Pilgrim's Pride, County Conservation Districts, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, PennAg Poultry Council, PennAg Industries Association and Penn State University.

With the assistance of project partners, we identified ten cooperating producers from each of the broiler, turkey, and layer industries to test the ability of the assessment tools to serve different poultry enterprises. We offered a financial incentive, and integrators recommended several producers for participation.

Project staff visited each participating poultry operation to evaluate following areas:

- Site Appearance
- Drinking Water Supply
- Septic System Design and Operation

EMS Success

"The Pennsylvania Environmental Agriculture Conservation Certificate of Excellence program is considering using the EMS developed by PennAg Industries and Penn State University as part of its certification of poultry farms in Pennsylvania."

--Paul Patterson, Penn State University, Department of Poultry Science.

- Runoff Issues
- Pest, Odor and Dust Management
- Mortality Management
- Farm Nutrient Balance
- Manure Exporting
- Land Application Practices
- Biosecurity and Pathogen Management
- Emergency Action Planning

These on-site visits were followed by a written evaluation pointing out low risk areas and opportunities for improvement. To be sensitive to the time constraints felt by poultry producers, and to keep information accessible, we kept the site visit to about 2 hours and produced the assessment results on a single page.

Lessons Learned

Survey responses from producers in Pennsylvania indicate that this tool was helpful and beneficial to their poultry operations.

- The producers enjoyed the personal contact of a farm-visit, and in evaluations more than 75% of producers said they preferred the 3rd party assessment to a self-assessment. Producers were very comfortable with the one-on-one



The careful management of poultry litter is a key part of the implementation of the poultry EMS.

atmosphere, and many said that they probably would not have taken the time out on their own to perform a self-assessment.

- One third of the producers indicated that they are interested in moving beyond the assessment to pursue an EMS.
- One important lesson learned from the pilot test is that the length of the assessment does matter. Producers have very little extra time on their hands with all the responsibilities involved with running a poultry operation. Having an assessment tool that was concise and to the point was a definite advantage. When asked what they liked best about their assessment, the most frequent answer was the length. Producers were pleased that they could have a thorough environmental assessment that could be completed in a timely manner.
- We also found that many producers plan to make changes to their operations based on the information they received from their assessment and evaluation. Examples include adding contact information and procedures to their

emergency actions plans (e.g. catastrophic mortality management and fire and manure spills). Other examples include creating better mortality management options, and modifying water drainage in manure load-out areas.

- One other lesson learned from the pilot testing of our assessment tool is that it is vital for the questions to be very specific and pertain to each individual producer's operation. In testing our assessment tool on three different poultry commodity groups, we found that we could have designed a tool specific to each group individually: broilers, turkeys and layers.

All in all, our pilot test was a success and the future of this assessment tool in Pennsylvania is bright, especially with its adoption by the Pennsylvania Environmental Agriculture Conservation Certificate of Excellence Program (PEACCE), which promotes environmentally safe agricultural practices among livestock and poultry producers and recognizes those practicing good stewardship. This assessment is the first of its kind developed specifically for the Pennsylvania poultry industry and will be an asset to the state's agricultural environment.