

Virginia

Partnerships for Livestock Environmental Management Systems

Virginia's poultry industry ranked 5th and 9th nationally in turkey and broiler production in 2002. These operations, along with egg operations, contributed approximately \$617 million dollars to the Virginia economy. Nearly all of Virginia's poultry industry is located in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, raising concern about environmental consequences to this sensitive area. In an attempt to address potential environmental impacts, Virginia enacted the Poultry Waste Management Program in 2000, which requires producers with 20,000 or more chickens, or 11,000 or more turkeys, and using dry waste handling systems, to obtain a Virginia Pollution Abatement (VPA) General Permit for Poultry Waste Management. Approximately 80% of the industry falls under this regulation. The Poultry Waste Management Act specifies criteria for poultry producers to follow when dealing with their poultry waste, along with requirements for poultry processors and litter brokers. Yearly inspections of permitted facilities are conducted by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to ensure compliance.

Approach

The goal of the Virginia Environmental Management Systems Pilot Project was to determine how an EMS could be of use in an already regulated environment. At the beginning of our study, we assembled a diverse advisory committee of producer, industry, regulator, and academic interests. At the recommendation of our advisory committee, we designed the EMS materials, which included a 15-page Virginia Poultry EMS Guidebook and assessment tools, to be used in a "self-assessment" style to allow farmers to complete their EMS at their convenience, and eliminating confidentiality concerns. Topics for the assessment tools include: Regulations, Site Management, Nutrients, Odor, Manure Storage, Site Mortality, Pests, Biosecurity, Best Management Practices, and Exporting Manure to Off-farm Users.

Growers were identified through the five Integrator companies in Virginia, which have contracts with poultry growers in the state. In some cases the

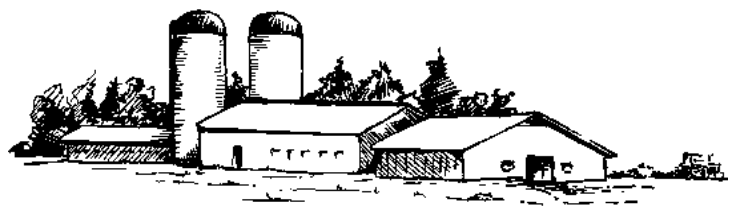
Feedback from producers on the Virginia LEMS Pilot Project:

All respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the information presented was useful to their operation.

"Anything of this nature that causes us to take a proactive position on environmental concerns is good"

"We all need to do our share with our environment."

integrator invited the participants directly, in other cases the integrator provided a list of names and addresses to project personnel, who in turn extended the invitation. We found that growers invited to the workshop by their integrator were much more likely to attend than those contacted directly by project personnel. Materials were introduced at a half-day workshop, during which producers were familiarized with the Virginia EMS procedure. Project personnel followed up with phone calls to discuss EMS development. At the request of workshop participants, a web site was developed that contained all of the project materials in a downloadable format.



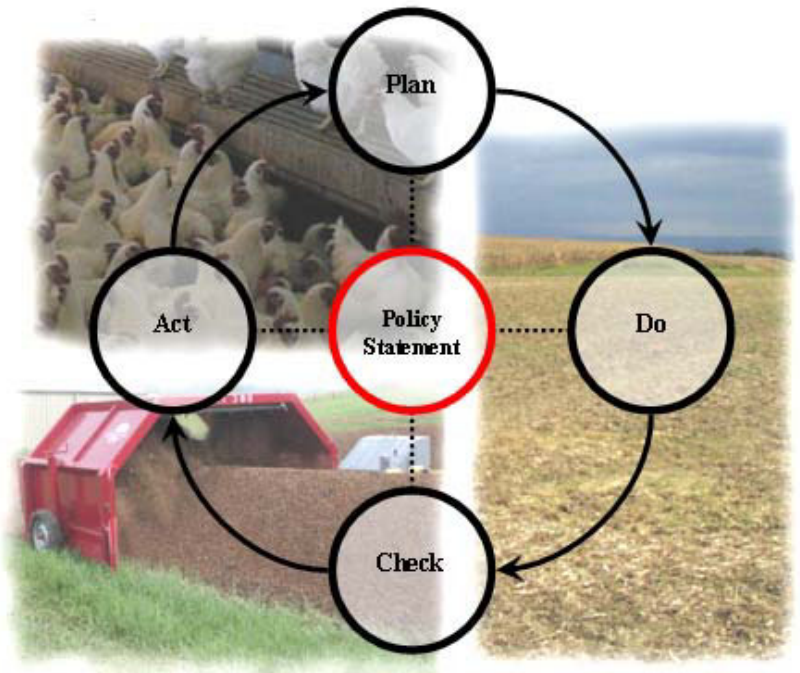
Outcomes & Lessons Learned

While most of the producers participating in the project felt the EMS program was admirable in its intent, concern was raised about the amount of time required for record keeping and paperwork. In fact, the majority of producers contacted by phone responded that they intended to look at the EMS material distributed at the workshop, but had been unable to find the time. Many of the producers were still struggling to comply with the newly adopted VPA Poultry Permit requirements, and viewed the EMS as an unnecessary exercise.

Many of the Integrators who assisted us in identifying participants indicated that they were interested in Poultry EMSs, but for use on operations in surrounding unregulated states. Producers commented that the EMS program should have been implemented in Virginia prior to the passing of the poultry legislation, eliminating the need for the current regulatory program. Also, many producers inquired about using the EMS for other commodities within their operation not covered by regulations, such as beef and dairy. They felt that the Virginia poultry regulations adequately protected the environment relative to their poultry operation.

The poultry producers who were most receptive to the project were the environmental leaders within the industry who were already recognized for their environmental stewardship. They viewed the program as another opportunity to document their level of accountability with regard to the environment.

More tangible incentives, including cost-share money, must be found to encourage not only the environmental leaders of the industry but also those struggling with performance issues. Additionally, poultry operations with multiple employees seemed more amenable to the EMS process than operations run by one individual. Despite the potential benefits outlined during the introductory phase of the workshop, individuals with no employees remained unconvinced that the extra effort of documentation would benefit them.



The Virginia Poultry Environmental Management System project homepage offers producers a number of resources for pursuing environmental assessments and learning more about EMS.

Finally, company owned farms required more guidance in developing an EMS than privately owned farms. Farm managers from company owned farms stated that they would not be able to decide on items like priority issues and the environmental policy statement without company involvement. Since Integrators, and not individual producers, own these operations, these items must be determined corporately.

Summary

This project found EMSs to be of limited use in a regulated environment such as Virginia, at least under the current conditions. Progress identifying additional incentives, either in the form of economic or regulatory relief, may make the process more attractive. Future efforts should focus on collaborating with integrator companies early to obtain the benefit of their close working relationships with individual poultry growers.

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The Virginia EMS materials can be found at: <http://poultryEMS.ag.vt.edu> This draft report was prepared for the "Partnerships for Livestock Environmental Management Assessment Systems" project, supported by a USDA-CSREES Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems grant, and by USDA-NRCS, <http://www.uwex.edu/AgEMS/livestock/>, 03/04.