

Consider neighbors when planning poultry operations

GEORGETOWN, Del. — Thinking of expanding your broiler operation or going into poultry production?

Before you put up any buildings, consider the impact you're likely to have on the neighbors.

Careful advance planning can save you money and avoid headaches later on, say University of Delaware energy management specialist Norman Collins and extension agricultural engineer Ernest Walpole. Collins is a researcher at the University's Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station.

Besides all the traditional factors that need to be considered when you're raising chickens, there are some new considerations in the area of environmental control and community impact that you need to be aware of.

It's best to take this into account early in the planning process - before you do any site development.

Today's farmer can no longer ignore the constraints imposed on production by such social and political concerns as zoning laws, pollution control and animal welfare, they say.

"As long as the trend continues for urban populations to move back to rural areas, you've got to be prepared for certain adjustment problems," says Collins.

"Just as people in the suburbs have to learn how to get along with the neighbor's dog, so folks who move to the country are going to have to feel comfortable in the presence of a livestock operation or there could be friction. You need

to develop a management system that minimizes the infringement of your poultry operation on other people in terms of odors, runoff, flies, dust, and other nuisances," he says.

Time was when you didn't have to think about such matters, but with rural strip development, many farms are no longer as isolated as they once were.

You can help avoid some problems by careful timing. For instance, on a combination poultry and grain farm, you might plan not to dry grain straight through the night if you're within hearing distance of area residents, since this is a rather noisy operation.

Wind can carry dust and odors quite a distance. So take the prevailing wind into consideration when locating your poultry farmstead. Avoid placing buildings where there are close neighbors downwind from prevailing summer winds.

Building codes are becoming more and more important from the standpoint of interest costs, energy use and safety, adds Collins. There's a lot of available information on these subjects. Again, it will pay you to become well-informed on these matters before you do any construction or spend money on site development.

Another factor which can't be overlooked is animal welfare. This issue is becoming increasingly important. As you develop your management system you need to be aware of what animal welfare proponents are advocating on issues that affect production. It would be wise to choose a

system that avoids potential problems in these areas.

For instance, there's considerable concern over high ammonia levels and wet litter - two problems which can affect animal health. Both can be solved by good management.

The kind of ventilation system you install and how you operate it are very important in this respect. The engineers also recommend you adopt a management plan which avoids caging birds, as this practice is coming more and more under fire.

Plan new facilities so that you avoid overcrowding, too. For both basic animal health and maximum performance it's important not to confine stock beyond what's absolutely necessary, they say.

The problem with designing a new poultry facility for animal welfare is the lack of guidelines.

No one has really looked into the question of farm animal 'rights' in terms of what they actually need. There are some cases where a move to confinement may actually prove beneficial.

In turkey production, for instance, this has reduced mortality rates and losses to predators, so the practice in this case could be interpreted as humane.

"For today," says Walpole, "we should concentrate on management practices that improve bird health and provide an ideal environment for them. And we should avoid those practices that may be criticized in the

future. There will be a continuing need to justify by documentation the management practices we use."

The environmental impact of your poultry operation needs to be considered, too, whether you're starting from scratch or expanding. Today, compliance with pollution controls is just as important as compliance with zoning laws.

Find out what the regulations are and how you can meet them - especially when it comes to your manure-handling system.

This will be particularly important if you intend to use a liquid system. Most broiler manure is handled in a dry form and won't cause pollution unless it's piled where there's potential for runoff. If you do expect to store it, take care to minimize this possibility.

The size of your farmstead compared to the overall farm is related to potential manure problems. A farmer with considerable grain acreage can use the manure as fertilizer. But if a farmer has only four or five acres devoted exclusively to poultry production, you won't have enough land to use up all that's produced.

Most growers clean their houses once a year. When you do this will have a lot to do with how easy it is to get rid of the manure once it's been removed.

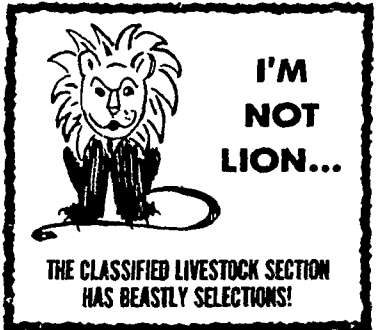
In May, there's likely to be little demand for it - at least on cropland. This means you could have a problem storing it unless you've thought this problem

through ahead of time. You may need some type of water diversion or fly control program for temporary storage.

The Soil Conservation Service is one agency you should consult for help in planning a manure management program that meets current pollution control laws.

These are all important matters to consider early in the planning stage of a poultry operation, say Collins and Walpole. Once construction starts, it's a lot harder to make changes. It's also likely to cost you more.

Walpole and Collins recently collaborated with University of Maryland extension agricultural engineer L.E. Carr in a study of all the factors involved in designing a farmstead for poultry production. The above considerations deal with just one aspect of the overall planning process.



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