BROILER TIP . . .

COST-SHARE ASSISTANCE CAN HELP PREVENT PRODUCTION LOSSES DURING DROUGHT CONDITIONS

Georgia has experienced drought conditions for the last four years. Drought conditions put wells under tremendous strain to provide for the needs of many of our commercial broiler operations. When it comes to broiler production, a drought may result in reduced water supply that can not meet the consumption demands of the birds or provide for full operation of the evaporative cooling systems. Water restrictions or inadequacies can have a dramatic effect on bird performance through higher mortality rates and decreased live weights. Increased water rates and the cost of new or supplemental water sources can have a direct impact on production costs. Increased numbers of insect pests and water quality impairments can also be the outcome of local drought conditions as they search for water by entering buildings and structures. On a wider scale, regional or national drought conditions can result in higher feed manufacturing and transportation costs and possible decline in feed or ingredient availability.

In our current drought conditions, some growers have had to dig additional wells or deepen existing ones. The average cost of digging a well can vary. In some areas where soil types are more consistent and with higher water tables, well drillers may charge a flat fee for a new well. In most cases and locations, however, the cost is assessed on a per-foot of depth basis. The cost is also dependent on the ability to locate a new water source on a given property, the soil type and need for casing materials, and the proximity of the water source to the poultry houses. Deepening an existing well may be less costly, but may not achieve the desired results depending on how much water can be provided. In extreme cases, water must be hauled to poultry houses to provide the short term needs while a new reliable water source is found.

It is not uncommon to hear of growers who have pumped their wells dry or had inadequate flow causing the birds' water requirements not to be met or house cooling requirements not to be achieved. When water volume is not sufficient, a grower may try to conserve water by running only one or two fogger lines instead of all three. While some cooling benefit is derived from this, the inadequate...
wetting of the cooling pad will not allow for maximum cooling to be achieved, with obvious impact on bird performance. Pad life will also be decreased as dirt and grime build up due to improper amount of water flowing over the pad.

It is best to ensure that adequate water will always be available, especially in hot weather. Having a backup source of water, either a secondary well or the ability to tap into a municipal waterline may be just as important as having a backup generator for the occasional power failure. Failure to provide adequate water can result in significant economic losses to broiler growers.

If situations arise where a well runs dry or does not meet the demand as a result of drought conditions, what recourse do broiler growers have? In most cases the only feasible option is to dig additional wells or try to deepen existing ones. When such is the case, programs are in place that can help to defer some of the costs of digging a well and ease the financial burden on growers. One such federal program is the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), which is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) branch of the USDA. One of the missions of the FSA is to help farm operations recover from the effects of natural disaster. Drought conditions, depending on severity, are considered natural disasters and the ECP can provide cost-share assistance for operations requiring additional water sources for animal production that has been impacted due to drought conditions.

In order to qualify for ECP funding, an affected county must be classified as suffering from a drought, based on a determination that rainfall levels that are 30% or more below normal over a 12-month period. The county-based FSA office, the Cooperative Extension Service and rural development authorities will initiate and complete the classification process. Once a county receives drought classification status, a grower might contact the local FSA office and fill out an application to apply for ECP assistance funds.

For a farm to qualify for assistance through the ECP, the grower will have to show that adequate water for the operation was present prior to the drought and that the practice (i.e. new well) is needed to provide water to meet basic production requirements. If the on-farm requirements of the program are met, then a new or enhanced well can be dug and the grower can be reimbursed up to 50% of the cost. The amount of cost-share awarded will vary depending on budgetary allocations to the program and the number of applications seeking assistance. A farm-specific inspection will be conducted by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as part of the requirements of the assistance program.

Contact your local FSA or County Extension office for additional information as to individual county drought status and qualifications for the ECP program.

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