BROILER TIP . . .

SUBURBAN MYTHS - PART I

Local authorities, especially county governments, sometimes defend zoning and land use plan decisions allowing subdivisions in agricultural areas using a variety of schemes. One is by saying that although the new development will certainly change the environment of that area, that overall there will be less pollution than if it is left agricultural (especially pastures where manure is applied). This is a myth without merit.

For most areas being developed in Georgia, homes in a new subdivision must usually be located on at least 6/10 of an acre where septic systems are used (lot sizes may be smaller if a sewer is in place). The home itself, a paved driveway, patio or deck, swimming pool, and any outbuildings or other structures can reduce this by another 2/10 of an acre as these are impervious surfaces, unavailable for water runoff or percolation.

Now, add an outside dog to the backyard (on approximately 2/10 of an acre). A good sized dog, such as a Labrador retriever, may excrete liquid and solid waste at an average of 2.5 pounds per day, or 913 pounds annually (depending on body weight and diet). On a per acre basis the annual manure application rate for that area is 2.3 tons per year, compared to the maximum recommended poultry litter application rate of 5 tons per acre annually for pastures. In other words, two dogs per household in a subdivision approximately equal the maximum manure loading for a given area that a broiler farm would contribute. If smaller lots are used where sewers are available, homeowners also have cats, or if there are more than two dogs per household, then the subdivision will greatly exceed what any agricultural operation would ever apply to the land. Plus, the storm sewers pass this pollution much quicker to the streams and lakes. Even recalculating the manure loading based on the total subdivision area does not substantially change the numbers, as much of the area is under paved roads and many of the houses sit on what were buffer areas for the farm. Also, since many lawns are over fertilized with commercial fertilizer, suburban homeowners are a significant threat to the environment.

PUTTING KNOWLEDGE TO WORK

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So, if your local government is rezoning agricultural land for subdivisions, there are two valid questions to be asked. First, why are they allowing excessive polluters into the area, and second, why aren't pet owners in subdivisions required to have nutrient management plans?

Douglas P. Smith
Extension Poultry Scientist

County Extension Coordinator/Agent

**Consult with your poultry company representative before making management changes.**

“Your local County Extension Agent is a source of more information on this subject”