BROILER TIP...

GET YOUR NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN DONE NOW!

Animal agriculture in general and poultry production in particular have been receiving more than a little criticism from environmental activists lately. Consider the following statements contained in a letter to the editor published in the April 17, 2000 issue of The Atlanta Constitution. "Scientists have specifically identified poultry as a major source of nutrient (read 'chicken manure') in streams located in the upper Chattahoochee, the Little Tallapoosa and the Flint Rivers. This is not surprising given that large waste piles open to the weather are the predominant form of waste 'management' in the Georgia poultry industry. Swimmers in Lake Lanier and other Georgia waters will regret that these waste piles are not even addressed by the current draft of EPD's proposed regulations."

This statement is not unusual. In public meetings discussing proposed regulations for confined animal facilities, environmental activists have leveled a barrage of charges against poultry, cattle and hog farmers. Certainly farmers must take responsibility for any failures on their part regarding environmental protection; however, often these criticisms are baffling to those of us who know and work with farmers. We know that farmers are the original environmentalists. No self-respecting farmer would ever intentionally do anything to hurt the environment. Most consider their farms a legacy for their children and grandchildren. Farmers want to leave that land in better shape than when they received it.

For the last 9 months, Cooperative Extension Service County Agents and other specialists in the University of Georgia, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences have been working with poultry farmers to develop voluntary comprehensive nutrient management plans. Over 3,500 poultry farmers have attended training sessions across the state, and the attitude of farmers at these sessions has been extraordinary. Just as one would have predicted, poultry farmers have reacted with comments such as "I want to protect the environment I am offended by claims that I am a polluter. This whole nutrient management thing is good, common sense farming I have been doing this for as long as I have been farming and didn't know it," etc. Those of us who work with poultry farmers already knew how farmers felt about their farms, but it has really made us proud to see again firsthand the very positive and responsible attitude farmers have about protecting the environment. Now that almost all poultry farmers have attended trainings regarding nutrient management planning, it is time
to put these plans down on paper and implement them. It is absolutely essential that this been done quickly. Some critics have questioned whether poultry farmers will really be serious about voluntary nutrient management plans and have recommended that mandatory regulations be set in place. It appears certain that poultry farmers will receive only one chance to control their destiny regarding environmental protection. If poultry farmers fail to implement effective voluntary environmental protection plans, then mandatory regulations will be unavoidable.

If you have not begun to implement a nutrient management plan for your farm, please do so immediately. It is not difficult. As stated before, it is mainly just common sense farming. The basics of the plan are simple.

Have your litter tested for plant nutrient composition - N, P and K (free of charge for Georgia farmers).

1. Have your soil tested for plant nutrient levels (free of charge for Georgia farmers).
2. Calculate and record the quantity of manure produced on your farm.
3. Develop a nutrient budget to match the nutrient needs of your crops or forages with the nutrients in your litter.
4. Record the amounts of litter and other fertilizer applied to your land or the amounts sold or given away.
   Use best management practices for land application of litter.
5. Document everything and maintain records on all of the above.

Besides contributing to protection of the environment, nutrient management plans make farmers money by allowing them to use the valuable nutrients contained in litter more effectively, and may also provide legal protection from environmental lawsuits and nuisance complaints. And, as one poultry farmer commented at one of the training sessions, "It is just the right thing to do."

If you need help putting your plan together, your local County Extension Office can provide assistance. Give them a call. County Extension Agents are experts regarding agriculture and the environment, and they love to help farmers. We hope poultry farmers will meet this challenge, prove the critics wrong and demonstrate again that farmers are the true environmentalists.

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

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