BROILER TIP...

FOOD SAFETY ON THE BROILER FARM

Even though poultry products are safer and more wholesome today than any time in history, there is more and more talk about food safety. USDA has recently implemented strict regulations and procedures that address microbiological quality of poultry meat in an effort to reduce risk of food borne diseases. Broiler companies have developed detailed Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plans to minimize the possibility of microbiological contamination of poultry products in their processing plant.

It appears to be USDA's intent to extend HACCP plans beyond the processing plant to live production. The rationale is that microorganisms, such as Salmonella and Campylobacter, that may contaminate poultry products, do not originate in the processing plant, but rather these bacteria are carried by the birds from the field to the plant. USDA believes that if these microorganisms can be reduced or eliminated from birds in the broiler house, then poultry products originating from these birds will be safer for consumption.

Although the logic and feasibility of totally eliminating food borne pathogens is debatable, there are a number of best management practices that growers can implement to minimize food safety concerns.

Reduce Litter Moisture: Some researchers believe that wet litter creates an environment where Salmonella and other food related pathogens can thrive and survive. Obviously, this environment would promote the spread of such pathogens within a broiler flock. The best way to keep litter dry is to ventilate effectively, deliberately concentrating on removing excess moisture from the broiler house. Keeping litter dry is best accomplished by keeping humidity levels inside the house at 75% or less during cold weather. High humidity levels are not as critical during hot weather because ventilation rates are typically adequate to keep litter moisture in check; however, evaporative cooling systems can contribute to litter wetness problems if not managed properly.
Rodent Control: Rodents are known carriers of a number of microorganisms associated with food borne disease. Rats and mice not only consume feed meant for broilers and physically damage broiler housing and equipment, but their droppings may also contaminate feed and pass pathogens on to birds. A well designed and implemented rodent control plan is a must for every broiler operation.

A basic broiler house rodent control program consists of keeping vegetation mowed around the broiler house, removing all trash, junk, brush piles, etc. that might provide harborage for rodents, using effective rodenticide baits and bait stations properly, timely replenishing of baits on a scheduled basis, and planned monitoring of rodent populations to evaluate your rodent control program. Rodenticides should always be used according to manufacturer's label directions. Many broiler companies, rodenticide companies and universities have detailed plans that deal with long term control and monitoring of rodent populations. Such plans save growers money by protecting the health of their birds and the longevity of their equipment and buildings.

Wild Bird Exclusion: Just as with rodents, wild birds are known carriers of many of the bacteria related to food safety issues. Total and complete exclusion of wild birds from poultry houses is a necessity both when broilers are present and between flocks. Dropping curtains and opening end doors between flocks to air out houses is a good practice; however, poultry wire or netting must be used to cover all openings to prevent wild birds from entering and contaminating the broiler house during the airing out process.

Sound management, good biosecurity and elimination of all unnecessary stress will go a long way in preventing the establishment of microorganisms in broiler flocks that may be a food safety concern. You really can't go wrong paying attention to best management principles because they will help ensure your flocks are as healthy, productive and profitable as possible.

Michael P. Lacy
Extension Poultry Scientist

Extension County 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”