Barn Densities: What are your Responsibilities?

There is no way to predict the potential chick quality and livability of your next flock. After a few flocks of higher than expected mortality, some producers will increase their chick order for the next placement in attempt to compensate. What happens when this flock ends up having low mortality, or when this low mortality is combined with a faster than expected growth rate? The total weight of the birds in the barn can suddenly exceed the maximum capacity calculated for your barn under the Animal Care Program. This fall we have been having some very good results and, as a result, some producers have tested the limits of their maximum density. This has affected both producers who have not changed their chick placement numbers and those who have increased it.

What does this mean for you?

In addition to potential fines for overproduction, it raises a red flag for your farm. If you exceed your barn weight capacity once, *and there is a reasonable explanation or plan for how to avoid a re-occurrence,* there will likely be no impact from a penalty standpoint; however, if maximum density is exceeded on an ongoing/consistent basis (for example, a re-occurrence within the next 3 flocks), a Corrective Action (CAR) will be issued and the producer will need to correct the problem to remain in compliance with the Animal Care Program. Your program auditors will be looking for your density calculations and your plan for how to address the issue in subsequent flocks. If it is an ongoing issue, part of your due diligence should include a call to your processor to discuss mitigation strategies such as reducing your chick placement number (if mortality is low).

Anti-Microbial Use Surveys

Across Canada, broiler producers are completing the Chicken Farmers of Canada's Anti-Microbial Use (AMU) survey. Once completed, the producer receives a personalized, confidential report from CFC. Once CFC has acquired sufficient preliminary data, provincial and national aggregated data will help the provincial boards and CFC guide the direction of the AMU strategy. Because the survey is taking place over a period of years, it can be used to characterize changes in AMU use in response to specific bans or to shifts in industry practice. The results of the AMU survey could be used to share the success stories of positive change. It could also be used to shape future AMU targets or limits.

The survey is still below the critical mass of responses to be able to make more than general observations at the National or regional levels. In Alberta, our audit team will continue to complete the AMU survey with you as part as part of their on-farm audits. For those of you who were unable to complete the survey on a previous visit, the program auditors will be following up with you to complete it as part of their next on-farm audit visit.

We need to make sure that our producers are accurately portrayed in the overall survey, and request that you be prepared to complete the survey during your next on-farm audit visit.

Elevated Avian Influenza Risk during the Fall Migration

The sounds of the fall migration are in full swing in Alberta. With it comes the elevated risk of infection with Avian Influenza (AI). Unfortunately the AI virus has a much better ability to survive under cold, wet winter conditions that it does in hot, dry summer conditions.

Now is our chance to think about our daily routines and farm set-up that could increase the chances of our barn getting infected. Cross-contamination from our feet and hands is one of our biggest risks for infection. It is also one of the areas we know the most about in terms of biosecurity. Good hand-washing and footwear changing protocols are essential. Movement of family or staff between farms, and equipment sharing were identified as biosecurity breaches that spread the disease. If you are moving equipment between barns or farms, plan to wait 48 to 72 hours after sanitization to complete the disinfection process. The bottom line is that if your barn biosecurity is good, you are keeping potential contamination off your clothes and out of your vehicles, shops, and homes.

Is Successful Broiler Production Tougher Today?

All Alberta processors are in the process of introducing breed changes to some or all of their producers. We will soon have Ross 708 or Cobb 500 broilers on our farms. The Ross 308 will remain, but at a reduced level. What does this mean for your flock management? There may an adjustment period where our brooding and barn management practices don't seem to be quite as effective. Work closely with your processor to learn about the nuances of the new breeds.

You may have concerns that are relevant to all Alberta producers. Call your Producer Programs Manager, Rob Renema, to share the issues you are having with current genetic stocks. If solutions are not available, this information can be used to direct planning for future workshops and educational materials. It can also be used to provide feedback directly to the genetic companies.

The most successful broiler operations can attribute their success to a mix of careful, consistent management and good working relationships with hatcheries and broiler breeder producers. Rob Renema has a history in poultry research and maintains contact with the global tech services and nutrition teams. Sharing a unified summary of the challenges we face on Alberta farms can help shape development of tech support services, tech bulletins, or even genetic selection programs.