BRINGING THE LATEST INFORMATION TO MPA MEMBERS
by Mark Leggett, President, Mississippi Poultry Association

MPA exists to serve its members’ needs and one of those is education. We are trying something different this year. The plan the board approved is to bring educational opportunities closer to the members in a half-day seminar in multiple locations on topics of interest several times this year.

We will not have Poultry Management School this year as we have in the past. The schedule for our Spring Broiler Seminars on summer time preparation for service techs and growers is shown in the box below. Lunch starts at noon.

APRIL 16, 2014 Jones County Junior College, College Drive, Ellisville
C. L. Neil Student Center

APRIL 23, 2014 Copiah Lincoln Community College, Wesson
The Thames Center

APRIL 30, 2014 Roosevelt State Park, Morton
The Alfreda-Harris Lodge

In August we will have Pullet/Breeder/Hatchery seminars in several locations on consecutive Wednesdays. The dates for 2014 have not been set. We received good reports from those who attended the 2013 seminars with speakers from MSU, Aviagen, Cobb-Vantress, and Hubbard.

In October we will have our final seminar for growers and company personnel to focus on winter-time issues for broilers. Our first education effort of the year was February 27 on poultry diseases. The speakers who were speaking the next day at the Mississippi Veterinary Medicine Association meeting in Starkville came to the Diagnostic Lab in Pearl a day early to give their presentations for MPA members.

If you are interested in sponsoring, attending, or exhibiting at any of these events, please contact Becky Beard at beard@mspoultry.org or 601-214-8883.
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Now that spring is here, we can all be thankful that the winter of 2013-14 is done. The last few months have been brutally cold and then a few days later pleasant and warm before another blast of arctic air.

The Mississippi Poultry Association has been working on behalf of its members to express their concerns to policy makers in Jackson and Washington during the last few months.

The propane supply problems of January and February were especially costly to poultry growers. Some of whom at times saw their supplier suspend delivery or had to pay more for propane as prices spiked. Experts called it a perfect storm of factors that restricted supply as the Polar Vortex hit.

MPA worked with Governor Phil Bryant’s office and Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney and our Congressional delegation. Chaney, who oversees propane, issued a blanket order allowing propane companies to take on new customers if their supplier could not deliver and to supply the gas without the required safety inspections for new customers. We worked with our Congressional delegation, several of whom signed onto letters to President Obama urging him to direct federal agencies to relax regulations and to provide assistance to farmers and others hit by the propane crisis. Senators Thad Cochran and Roger Wicker and Representative Gregg Harper signed onto the letters to the President.

The 2014 legislative session in Jackson has seen its usual ups and downs as the deadlines came and went for bills to move toward the April 6 adjournment. Here are some of the issues that MPA has been involved with this session:

MPA has been deeply involved in working to improve rural roads and bridges to make it easier for feed trucks, live haul trucks and propane trucks to get to farms. After working with a Senate Study Committee last summer and fall, MPA has supported efforts to have our universities look at transportation needs in ways that will boost our existing industries like poultry. MPA also supports efforts to increase funding for the Local Bridge Replacement Program from the $20 million last year.

MPA supports adding agricultural equipment into the list of heavy equipment (more than 5,000 pounds) and leased for less than 365 days which would not be subject to property taxes.

MPA supports adequate funding for the agricultural units at Mississippi State University that support the poultry industry such as the College of Veterinary Medicine, the Diagnostic Lab in Pearl, the Cooperative Extension Service, and others. The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality is another agency that needs enough funds to handle the duties delegated to the department by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency so that Mississippians are overseeing environmental programs and not the federal government.

MPA opposed legislation to make Mississippi the only state in the nation to label poultry products imported from other countries. Americans prefer chickens raised in the U.S. so much that 99.5 percent of the chicken sold in the U.S. is U.S. raised. Labeling the 0.5 percent coming from elsewhere could have hurt Mississippi companies’ ability to increase exports. Overseas exports are where poultry production will grow. Many experts believe Americans have about hit the maximum in poultry consumption, so the way to grow the industry is to convince more people overseas of the benefits of poultry from Mississippi.

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The 2014 MPA Legislative Luncheon had a strong turnout with over 200 people present. MPA allied and company members were there to speak with legislators and vigorously promoted our industry to the many lawmakers and public officials attending. To start the luncheon, Alan Andrews, Director of Marketing for Cal-Maine, welcomed the attendees and MPA Chairman and Director of Development and Engineering for Sanderson Farms, Bob “Pic” Billingsley gave the invocation.

This year, Chef Nick Wallace taught guests how to make nutritious omelets packed with chicken and vegetables. Mississippi Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Cindy Hyde-Smith also attended the event where she cooked a breakfast burrito with chicken meat with Nick on stage. To help ensure all the guests were taught how to make his delicious omelets, Nick trained over 10 lawmakers of both parties to assist the other guests. The remainder of the event was a time for the lawmakers and public officials to enjoy their own omelet creations and witness firsthand the delicious and nutritious value that our commodity produces.

The event was co-sponsored by MPA and the Mississippi Egg Marketing Board. Sanderson Farms provided chicken wings, which were a big hit, to go with the omelets.
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The Mississippi Poultry Association had the privilege of speaking to the Carthage Rotary Club on February 7. There were over fifty Rotary members present who represented many professions and industries in the Carthage area. Mark Leggett, President of the Mississippi Poultry Association, spoke on the history of the poultry industry, production statistics for Mississippi, and current events and issues that face our industry today. After the presentation, there were many great conversations and questions. We appreciate the invitation and opportunity to speak to the members of the Carthage Rotary Club.

If you are interested in the Mississippi Poultry Association speaking to your civic organization or school, please contact the Mississippi Poultry Association. We love to spread the word about Mississippi’s number one agricultural commodity!
President Obama, after three years of debate within both houses of Congress, signed the Agricultural Act of 2014, better known as the Farm Bill into law on February 7, 2014. This monumental bill not only encompasses agricultural and conservation programs but also the Federal government’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps. The entire bill is 959 pages that goes into lengthy detail on funding and operational guidelines each entity and program will have. Over the next ten years, the Farm Bill will cost an estimated 954.4 billion to maintain. Below is a chart that will show the disbursement of funds to the key aspects of the bill.

What’s in the farm bill? (Costs from FY2014-2023)

Overall, the bill cut $16.5 billion in spending for the next ten years, while increasing crop insurance funding by $6 billion. Programs that received cuts: SNAP (food stamps) cut by $8 billion, Farm Subsidies and Commodities cut by $14 billion, and Conservation programs cut by $4 billion. Many hoped for more stringent cuts, but after three years and no bill, compromising on certain particulars was necessary for a bill to go into effect.

Mississippi Senators Thad Cochran (R) and Roger Wicker (R) and Representatives Nunnelee (R), Thompson (D), Harper (R), and Palazzo (R) all voted in favor of the Farm Bill. There are several key aspects of the bill that offer beneficial assistance and funding to poultry producers. Below is a small summary of each, along with the amount of funding allocated to the program.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

EQIP provides financial assistance to develop and implement conservation practices that better our soil, water, plant, air and other resources on farms and on timberland. EQIP will receive a gradual increase of funding each year up to $1.75 billion by 2018. The bill sets aside 60% of EQIP funds to be used for poultry and other livestock production practices. Also, the EQIP payment limit has been raised from $300,000 to $450,000.

The increase in funding is as follows: FY2014: $1.35 billion, FY2015: $1.6 billion, FY2016: $1.65 billion, FY2017: $1.65 billion, FY2018: $1.75 billion

RURAL ENERGY FOR AMERICAN PROGRAM (REAP)

Has funds available to complete energy audits, complete energy efficiency improvements, and install renewable energy systems. REAP also has programs that help convert older heating sources to cleaner technologies, produce advanced biofuels, install flexible fuel pumps, install solar panels, build bio refineries, and much more.

The new Farm Bill has created a three tier funding application process. The tiers are as follows: Tier One – $80,000 or below, Tier Two – $80,000 to $200,000, and Tier Three – greater than $200,000. The most simplified application, evaluation and oversight process will be for tier one. Tiers two and three will have a more in depth application, evaluation and oversight process because of the considerable increase in funds that could be allocated to an applicant.

REAP will receive $50 million annually for ten years, a total of $500 million.

STUDY ON POULTRY CATASTROPHIC DISEASE PROGRAM

This section of the Farm Bill mandates a qualified researcher to conduct a study on the feasibility of insuring poultry producers from catastrophic events. Within a year, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) will report on their findings to the House Committee on Agriculture and to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. MPA will continue to monitor the progress of this study.

POULTRY BUSINESS INTERRUPTION INSURANCE POLICY

From the day the Farm Bill is enacted, there will be one year for the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) to conduct a study on the feasibility of an insurance plan to protect growers from catastrophic losses due to disease (p.858).

From the day the Farm Bill is enacted, the FCIC can enter into an agreement with an education institution to examine the feasibility of developing strategies to protect growers from an integrator’s bankruptcy. Researchers will have to:

1. Evaluate the market place for business interruption insurance that is available to poultry growers
2. Determine what statutory authority would be
necessary to implement a business interruption insurance through the Corporation

3. Assess the feasibility of a policy or plan of insurance offered under this subtitle to insure against a portion of losses due to business interruption or to the bankruptcy of a business integrator

4. Analyze the costs to the Federal Government of a Federal business interruption insurance program for poultry growers or producers.

CONTINUING ANIMAL HEALTH AND DISEASE, FOOD SECURITY, AND STEWARDSHIP RESEARCH, EDUCATION, AND EXTENSION PROGRAMS

This grant is a competitive grant designed for National Land Grant Colleges of Agriculture (Mississippi State University and Alcorn University) to conduct research—to promote food security, such as improving feed efficiency, improving energetic efficiency, connecting genomics, proteomics, metabolomics and related phenomena to animal production, improving reproductive efficiency, enhancing pre- and post-harvest food safety systems, on the relationship between animal and human health, such as by exploring new approaches for vaccine development, understanding and controlling zoonosis (disease transmission between species), including its impact on food safety improving animal health through feed enhancing product quality and nutritive value.

This program is funded at $25 million annually from 2014 through 2018.

FOUNDAITION FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE RESEARCH

This section creates the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research. The purpose is to match federal funds with private funds to continue the innovation of America’s farming techniques and methods to insure the continual growth of the nation’s food supply. The section notes that one purpose of creating the foundation was to help offset the downward turn in agricultural funding throughout the country.

This program is funded with a one-time allocation of $200 million.

NATIONAL POULTRY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The national government will continue to administer diagnostic testing for H5/H7 low pathogenic avian influenza. Funding will be consistent with 2013 FY funding.

FARM SERVICE AGENCY (FSA) LOANS

There are several types of loans made available by the Farm Bill through the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Below is a list of FSA loans that poultry producers could potentially be eligible to apply for. To ensure eligibility, please contact your local FSA Agent.

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February 10 marked the 5th Annual Pro Start Competition organized by the Mississippi Hospitality and Restaurant Association. Students from around Mississippi convened at Table 100 in Flowood, Mississippi, to compete for a share of over one million dollars in college and culinary scholarships.

Participants competed in two categories: Culinary and Management. Culinary teams were judged based on taste and presentation of their three course meal and knife skills. Management teams were graded on their original restaurant concept and ability to address and solve issues that arise from operating a restaurant on a day to day basis.

Pro Start is a two-year program designed to provide practical and hands on education to aspiring high schools students interested in pursuing careers in the hospitality and restaurant industries. In Mississippi alone, there have been over 1,540 students and 43 schools that have participated. Of the 1,540 students, 90 of the top performing students from across the state qualified to compete in the competition Flowood.

This year's winners who will represent Mississippi in the National Pro Start Competition in Minneapolis, Minnesota, are Oak Grove High School (management) and Laurel High School (culinary).

The Mississippi Poultry Association has been a proud sponsor since Pro Start's inception in Mississippi. We are proud to see our future culinary workforce choosing to prepare their competitive entrées with poultry, Mississippi's number one agricultural commodity!
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READUS NAMED NEW STATE CONSERVATIONIST

The Mississippi Poultry Association would like to welcome Kurt Readus, Mississippi’s new State Conservationist with the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). Mr. Readus is a graduate of Alabama Agricultural and Technical College in Huntsville, Alabama. He graduated with a Bachelors of Science Degree in Environmental Science.

Mr. Readus began working for the NRCS as a college student in 1998. Upon graduating, he took a full time position as a Soil Conservationist, and within five years he was promoted to District Conservationist in the Avondale Field Office in Arizona. Mr. Readus moved to Mississippi in 2007 where he accepted the position of Area Conservationist for Central Mississippi. As the Area Conservationist for Central Mississippi, he was responsible for managing 21 field offices and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians Tribal Field Office. Before becoming the State Conservationist, he served as the Assistant State Conservationist for Programs in Mississippi from January 2011 to September 2013.

Mr. Readus has worked diligently in providing assistance and direction to the NRCS offices throughout our State. His continual support of creating Nutrient Management Plans free of cost to poultry producers in Mississippi has been an extremely beneficial service. We, as an industry, are thankful to be able to work closely with Mr. Readus, and his fellow NRCS members. Without their continual support, creating Nutrient Management Plans and providing conservation cost share programs, Mississippi’s number one agricultural commodity, would lose some of its economic competitiveness.

Source: USDA

BROWN NAMED STATE CHEMIST, DIRECTOR OF MISS. STATE CHEMICAL LABORATORY

Ashli Brown, an accomplished Mississippi State University researcher and administrator for the Mississippi State Chemical Laboratory (MSCL), is taking the helm of that state agency housed on the land-grant institution’s campus. Brown has been named state chemist and director of the MSCL, effective October 1 and pending formal approval by the Mississippi Senate.

Previously, she served as the MSCL’s director of research and agriculture forensics.

Brown, a University of South Florida doctoral graduate, is a biochemist and molecular biologist with a research and teaching focus on aflatoxin, a group of toxic compounds produced by some molds that can contaminate stored food supplies like animal feed and peanuts. Her research interests include physical biochemistry, enzymology, protein kinases, insect pheromones and gas chromatography and mass spectrometry. She is on the faculty of MSU’s Department of Biochemistry, Molecular Biology, Entomology and Plant Pathology in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and is also a scientist in the University’s Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station.

Source: MSU

EPA ANNOUNCES REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy recently announced President Barack Obama’s selection of Heather McTeer Toney as regional administrator for EPA’s regional office in Atlanta, Georgia. EPA Region 4 includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and six tribal nations.

“Heather McTeer Toney has a proven track record and broad experience as an advocate and dedicated public servant,” said Administrator McCarthy. “I have full confidence that she’ll continue that sense of service and leadership working to protect people’s health and the environment as regional administrator in the region she was born, raised, and still calls home.”

Ms. McTeer Toney was the first African-American and first female to serve as the Mayor of Greenville, Mississippi, holding that post from 2004-2012. She joins EPA from Mississippi Valley State University, where she is the Executive Director of the Center for Excellence in Student Learning. She is also the Principal Attorney at Heather McTeer, PLLC.

Ms. McTeer Toney’s private-sector success is complemented by considerable experience in local and state politics. She began her career working as a member of McTeer and Associates Law Firm and handled a diverse group of cases ranging from racial discrimination to medical malpractice. Later she served as the President of the National Conference of Black Mayors and in 2009, was nominated by former EPA AdministratorLisa P. Jackson, to serve as the Chairwoman of the Local Government Advisory Committee. Heather is active in her community and an advocate for education, women’s issues, health, and wellness. She is married to Dexter Toney, and they have two children.

EPA regional administrators are responsible for managing the Agency’s regional activities under the direction of the EPA administrator. They promote state and local environmental protection efforts and serve as a liaison to government officials. Heather is expected to begin her role as regional administrator in January.

Source: EPA
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POULTRY GROWER ADVISES, INSPIRES NEXT GENERATION

by Kaitlyn Byrne
MSU Ag Communications

With 12 chicken houses and 10 years of experience in the poultry business, Delean Robertson of McComb, Mississippi, knows the important role women play in agriculture.

When Robertson’s husband, Donald, suggested starting a chicken farm in 2004 so he could quit his off-shore job and be home more often, Robertson said everything seemed to fall into place as if it were meant to be. The loan for Straight Arrow Farm was approved quickly. An auditor assistant, she transferred from Citizens Bank in Columbia to a closer branch in Magnolia.

“God seemed to be lining everything up for us,” she said. “Little did we know that my husband’s crew off-shore would be the ones that were killed when Deepwater Horizon blew up. God protected us by letting the plan for the farm work out before that happened.”

Robertson grew up on a dairy farm, so she was no new-comer to the agriculture industry. When they first started their poultry farm, Robertson helped with everything from cleaning chicken houses to setting up the houses for baby chicks and driving tractors. Being diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 2009 put an end to her intense physical labor in the farming venture. But she still handles the bookwork, runs farm errands, and helps out if an emergency arises.

“I helped with all of it – bookkeeping, running errands, driving tractors, cleaning the chicken houses, setting up the houses for baby chicks,” she said. “The physical part of the business became too difficult for me once I was diagnosed, though.”

Robertson and her husband expanded the farm from six houses to 12 in 2012, making their farm the largest square footage, single-owner farm in the McComb division of Sanderson Farms. They raise more than 2 million pounds of chicken every three months.

“The realization that we feed millions of people every year is the most rewarding...
experience,” she said. “Growing up on a farm, I learned a lot of valuable lessons for life. It is a heritage that has been given to me by my parents, and I hope I will be able to give the same to my children and grandchildren.”

When Robertson got involved with Mississippi Women for Agriculture in 2008, she gained practical tips for running a farm and found camaraderie with other women working in the agriculture industry. Robertson was on the first Mississippi Women for Agriculture board and has a lifetime membership.

“I believe for an ag business to be successful, it requires the owners to know all that they possibly can know about their industry,” she said. “Women are often the behind-the-scenes support on the farm. Educating the younger generations seems to be a big role that women have in the ag industry. The children of today will be leaders of tomorrow, so it’s essential they understand the importance of agriculture.”

Sylvia Clark, Mississippi State University Extension Service agent for family and consumer sciences, served on the Mississippi Women for Agriculture board with Robertson and said her leadership has been appreciated in the poultry industry.

“Delean is a go-getter and has been a real leader in the poultry industry for years,” Clark said. “Her extensive experience in all aspects of being a poultry grower can give others practical insight into making their businesses successful. She’s mentoring the next generation of business women involved in poultry farming.”

For more information about Robertson or Straight Arrow Farm, visit http://www.straightarrowfarm.com.
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Hilton Davis Farms LLC in Waynesboro, Mississippi, was one of six farms across the United States to receive the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association’s Family Farm Environmental Excellence Award during the International Poultry Expo, part of the 2014 International Production & Processing Expo in Atlanta. The U.S. Poultry & Egg Association (USPOULTRY) sponsors the annual awards in recognition of exemplary environmental stewardship by family farmers engaged in poultry and egg production.

Applicants were rated in several categories, including dry litter or liquid manure management, nutrient management planning, community involvement, wildlife enhancement techniques, innovative nutrient management techniques, and participation in education or outreach programs. Applications were reviewed and farm visits conducted by a team of environmental professionals from universities, regulatory agencies, and state trade associations in selecting national winners in six regions.

Hilton Davis Farms is owned and operated by Hilton and Denise Davis. The farm is 450 acres and consists of 10 broiler houses with a total capacity of 280,800 birds per flock. The farm grows broilers for Marshall Durbin. The farm also supports a 100 brood cow operation.

Hilton Davis Farms utilizes a nutrient management plan for applying litter to their land, along with a composting program to dispose of mortality. Utilizing cost share grants from the National Resource Conservation Service, Hilton and Denise built an efficient multi-lane composting structure to handle the volume of mortality from their 10-house broiler farm. The Hiltons took great care when selecting the location of the composting structure to ensure it would not negatively impact the environment. To help enhance wildlife, Hilton and Denise have multiple wildlife enhancement areas maintained throughout the year to help sustain and attract wildlife.

Elton Maddox, 2014 USPOULTRY chairman and president and CEO of Wayne Farms, Oakwood, Georgia, presented the award to the Davis family.

U.S. Poultry & Egg Association (USPOULTRY) is the all-feather organization representing the complete spectrum of today’s poultry industry, whose mission is to progressively serve member companies through research, education, communication, and technical assistance. Founded in 1947, U.S. Poultry & Egg Association is based in Tucker, Georgia. Contact Gwen Venable, gvenable@uspoultry.org, February 3, 2014.
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POULTRY REMAINS NO. 1 FOR 19TH STRAIGHT YEAR

POULTRY REMAINS NO. 1 FOR 19TH STRAIGHT YEAR

Poultry ranked No. 1 among Mississippi’s commodities for the 19th straight year, with a preliminary estimated value of $2.7 billion.

The total estimated value of poultry increased by about 10 percent from 2012. Broilers gained about 10 percent in value. Eggs and chickens saw a gain of 4.5 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively.

John Michael Riley, agricultural economist with Mississippi State University’s Extension Service, said the rise in values is largely attributed to higher bird prices because production is mostly steady with 2012.

“High feed costs dampened placements of eggs and chicks in the beginning of the year, which had overall broiler production falling,” Riley said. “But from July forward, corn production was good, allowing producers to increase their placements a little and offset the declines from early in the year.”

Tom Tabler, Extension professor in the Department of Poultry Science at MSU, said feed prices fell by about half throughout 2013, giving producers a little relief.

“In 2012, producers were paying about $8 per bushel for corn,” he said. “Now the price has fallen to $4.50 per bushel. That has helped a lot.”

Producers have had a good year overall with few external pressures.

“This summer was not terribly hot, which was less stressful on the birds and kept down the cost of cooling the chicken houses,” Tabler said. “This winter could be a different situation, though. It is somewhat colder than it usually is this time of year. If we experience a colder-than-normal winter, that will mean higher heating costs for producers.”

Tabler said the industry has experienced overall growth during 2013. He sees signs that the industry is confident going into 2014.

“There has been a slight expansion of the industry, not just in Mississippi, but across the country,” Tabler said. “Producers have seen fairly good market prices and feed prices that are in line with profitability.

“Sanderson Farms is building a brand new facility in Texas. They are putting in an entire operation, including a feed mill, hatchery, growing houses and a processing plant. Other companies aren’t that ambitious, but some have added 10, maybe 12 houses,” he said.

Poultry producers also may see an increase in demand at the grocery store, Riley said, as beef and pork producers face challenges that will likely decrease production.

Nationally, Mississippi ranks fifth behind Georgia, Arkansas, Alabama and North Carolina in poultry production.

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Mississippi producers placed approximately 548.9 million chicks through mid-September. That is a 2 percent decrease from one year ago. Table egg production rose to about 255 million through July, a 4 percent increase since 2012.

Contact Dr. John Michael Riley at 662-325-7986 or Dr. Tom Tabler at 662-325-3416.
On March 17, the U.S. EPA (EPA) won an important stay from the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in Orleans (Fifth Circuit) in a case about whether EPA or state agencies, such as the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), should set water quality standards for nutrients in rivers, streams and lakes in Mississippi and other states in the Mississippi River Basin. The Fifth Circuit stay means that, while the Fifth Circuit considers EPA’s appeal of a lower court decision requiring EPA to determine whether federal “numeric nutrient criteria” (NNCs) are necessary to address nutrient pollution, EPA can continue to work with MDEQ and other state agencies without making this determination.

MPA has been participating with MDEQ in its ongoing process to develop solutions to problems associated with levels of nutrients, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus, that are too high or too low in Mississippi rivers, streams and lakes. EPA has taken the position that these problems are so state-specific that MDEQ and other state environmental agencies are better equipped to make these decisions. The Fifth Circuit stay will allow EPA to continue its current policy of working with MDEQ to develop nutrient pollution solutions in Mississippi.

KEY BACKGROUND TO THE FIFTH CIRCUIT STAY

As background, in 2008, GRN, an environmental non-profit organization, petitioned EPA to determine that federal water quality standards, through development of federal NNCs, were necessary for every state in the country, or, alternatively, in MS River Basin states to control nutrient pollution. These are referred to as “necessity determinations” (NDs). EPA has taken the position that it can take any of three actions regarding petitions requesting NDs, all of which are in EPA’s sole discretion: (1) EPA can decide not to make an ND and notify the petitioner of its reasoning, (2) make a “positive ND”, which would compel EPA to propose and promulgate water quality standards, and (3) make a “negative ND”.

In 2011, EPA notified GRN that it would not make any ND, either positive or negative, concerning GRN’s petition for federal NNCs. EPA’s reasoning was that it would be “impractical, inefficient and counterproductive” to make these NDs since EPA was “cooperating with States to mitigate nutrient pollution and develop State-promulgated water quality standards preferred under the Clean Water Act”.

In 2012, GRN filed an action in federal district court seeking to require EPA to make NDs regarding federal NNCs. On September 20, 2013, the district court held that GRN’s petition compelled EPA to make an ND for every water quality standard sought and the court sent the case back (remanded) to EPA to make the NDs. The court’s order required EPA to make the NDs regarding federal NNCs by March 19, 2014.

EPA’S APPEAL TO THE FIFTH CIRCUIT

On November 13, 2013, EPA filed a notice of appeal in the Fifth Circuit of the district court’s ruling. On February 11, 2014, EPA petitioned the Fifth Circuit to stay the district court ruling until the Fifth Circuit has ruled on EPA’s appeal. EPA filed this motion so that it would not violate the district court’s order to make the NDs by March 19 and thereby “moot” its appeal. As stated earlier, the Fifth Circuit granted EPA’s motion to stay until it rules on EPA’s appeal.

On February 27, 2014, EPA filed its appellate brief, which explains the basis of EPA’s appeal. First, EPA takes the position that the district court “ignored the fact that Congress committed the decision to make a necessity determination” entirely to the EPA’s judgment. In so doing, Congress deprived the courts of jurisdiction to review the EPA’s choice not to make such a determination.” Secondly, EPA asserted that the district court incorrectly held that EPA “does not even have the option to decline to make a necessity determination in response to a petition.”

From EPA’s perspective, the district court’s ruling will have “immediate and substantial consequences” on the agency’s functions. EPA argues that, if the ruling is not reversed, it “faces the daunting task of making necessity determinations for multiple water quality standards throughout the country.” Even more broadly, EPA claims that “the impact of the court’s ruling – that a citizen’s petition can transform a discretionary statutory function into a mandatory duty – threatens to upend orderly administrative process and undermine Congress’ choice to give administrative agencies broad leeway to investigate other parties’ alleged violations of the agencies’ governing statutes.”

EPA’s primary request for relief is that the Fifth Circuit reverse the district court ruling “and hold that the EPA always has discretion to decline to make a ... necessity determination, even in response to a petition.” It should be noted that EPA stated an alternative request for relief in the event that the Fifth Circuit agrees with the district court “that the EPA must make a necessity determination when petitioned” to do so. This alternative request seeks to narrow the scope of NDs EPA must make to the states for which GRN has attempted to establish injury, which, according to EPA are only seven states: Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri and Ohio.

It is expected that the Fifth Circuit will issue a decision on EPA’s appeal by this fall. Until then EPA will not make any necessity determinations regarding nutrients. MDEQ will continue its ongoing process to consider whether to adopt numeric nutrient criteria or other alternative solutions to address nutrient pollution in Mississippi. MPA will continue to work with MDEQ, as well as with other business and industry groups, to identify potential solutions that will address the true extent of the problems in a cost-effective way.
MSU LOWERS PRICE FOR CHICKEN LITTER ANALYSIS

by Keri Collins Lewis

The more than 2,000 chicken growers in Mississippi can now save money on an annual test required to meet federal and state regulations and keep their samples in the state.

The Mississippi State Chemical Laboratory has lowered its fee for testing chicken litter to $35 to be more in line with fees charged by labs in neighboring states. Many of the state’s growers have been sending their samples to Louisiana and Arkansas.

“The price reduction makes the Mississippi State Chemical Lab much more competitive and affordable for the state’s poultry growers who need to have these tests run once a year, every year,” said Tom Tabler, MSU Extension poultry specialist. “Now they can keep their samples within the state for the same price or less.”

Lab reports will include total nitrogen, potash or potassium, moisture, phosphoric acid and pH levels. Tabler said these test results will both satisfy state and federal regulations and provide needed information for selling litter to brokers.

Growers should send a quart-sized sealable bag of litter to PO Box CR, Mississippi State, MS 39762 with a completed form found online at http://www.mscl.msstate.edu/pdf/submission_form.pdf. The usual turnaround time for test results is 30 days.

Payment must be included with the sample unless prior arrangements are made with the lab to use a credit card or purchase order.

For more information, contact the lab’s Quality Assurance Manager Gale Hagood at 662-325-2955 or State Chemist Ashli Brown at 662-325-3428.

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INTRODUCTION

The northern fowl mite, Ornithonyssus sylviarum, is regarded as the primary and most serious ectoparasite of poultry in North America (Axtell and Arends, 1990). Unfortunately, the same holds true for Mississippi. Mites and lice are the most destructive external parasites of the state’s poultry flocks (Goddard and Edwards, 2010). The northern fowl mite is common on wild birds and rodents, which readily introduce it into commercial poultry production facilities unless sound biosecurity practices are in place. Its entire life cycle is spent on the host, where it feeds on blood and is a source of irritation to the bird. Eggs are laid in masses at the base of the feathers, usually in the vent area. It is one of three species of fowl mite that are ongoing pests of commercial breeder and layer flocks.

The other two are 1) the chicken mite or red poultry mite (Dermanyssus gallinae) that stays hidden in cracks and crevices in the poultry house during the day and comes out to feed on the birds at night; and 2) the tropical fowl mite (Ornithonyssus bursa) that has similarities to the northern fowl mite.

LIFE CYCLE AND TRANSMISSION

The eight-legged adult northern fowl mite is about 1/26 inch long and dark red to black in color. There are 4 stages in the mite life cycle – egg, larva, nymph, and adult. The complete life cycle from egg to egg-laying female can be as little as 5–7 days. This can result in rapid increases in mite populations, especially on layers and breeders kept for extended periods. Female adult mites lay eggs directly on their host. The eggs hatch in 1 to 2 days, depending on the temperature and humidity. The larvae that hatch do not feed on the bird; however, larvae rapidly molt to the nymphal stage in about 8 hours (Kaufman et al., 1998). The nymphs do feed on blood from the birds and mature in 4-7 days. Adult female mites complete the egg laying process in 2 days after taking a blood meal from their host. The number of eggs laid per female is relatively small, usually 2 to 5. However, as mentioned earlier, the short life cycle means that mite populations can rise rapidly, with newly infested birds capable of supporting a mite population in excess of 20,000 per bird in 9 to 10 weeks under favorable conditions (Williams, 2010). Mites tend to congregate near the vent area; however the back is also a popular site as the mite population increases.

Birds infested with large northern fowl mite populations may suffer severe anemia and even death. Mite-stressed birds usually reduce feed intake, lose weight rapidly, may exhibit a pale pink comb (a symptom of anemia), and there can be lowered egg production of 10% or more (Williams, 2010). Heavy infestations may make birds more susceptible to other parasites and diseases that can result in death (Strother, 2008). In broiler breeder flocks, mites are also thought to impact semen production in males. However, the literature is not in total agreement on all impacts or at what level these impacts exist (Hogsette et al., 1991).

Northern fowl mites prefer temperatures around 65 to 68 °F and are often more of a problem during cool weather (winter), but may be found on birds at any time of year. Even though they spend the majority of their time on the host, a well-fed northern fowl mite may survive for 2 to 3 weeks off the host, at room temperature. Therefore, depopulating an infested flock and moving birds back into the house sooner than 3 weeks may not totally resolve a mite problem.

Mites are easily transmitted from bird to bird by direct contact or by crawling from one bird to another. A mite-free house can become infested by several different methods including people, a contaminated pullet hauling trailer, the introduction of an infested pullet flock, wild birds, rodents, or from contaminated egg flats and racks that are hauled from farm to farm by the egg truck. Older birds (older than 40 weeks) usually do not support large mite populations but populations can build rapidly on young birds 20 to 30 weeks of age (Williams, 2010). A severe northern fowl mite infestation can develop and spread through a flock in a relatively short period of time (3 to 6 weeks).

Light infestations of mites often go unnoticed and are difficult to identify. Mites may be noticed first on eggs or egg handlers before they are found on the birds. However, by the time mites start showing up on eggs, or workers begin to complain of mites, the infestation is usually well past the light stage and into the moderate or heavy stage. Individual mites on birds are nearly microscopic and may easily be missed as they crawl quickly across the skin near the vent area. Heavier infestations are easier to find because they produce a dark gray discoloration and matting of feathers around the vent.

BEST CONTROL IS PREVENTION

Prevention is by far the best and most effective method of fowl mite control. Taking steps necessary to exclude mite vectors such as wild birds and rodents from the poultry house and preventing the movement of mites from one farm to another on egg flats, racks, other equipment, or people is vital to mite control efforts. Spilled feed around feed bins or elsewhere should be promptly cleaned up before it can attract wild birds and rodents. Maintain bait stations along exterior and interior poultry house walls year round, both when birds are present and in-between flocks.

Keeping wild birds and rodents out of production houses means sealing up the holes and any possible entry point including (Stringham and Watson, 2003):

- End doors
- Electrical conduits and feed and water lines where they enter the building
- Fan housings
- Along eaves and at building corners
- Ridge vents and other air inlets
- Sidewall curtains
- Evaporative cooling systems (dog houses)
- Damaged siding or foundations

Monitoring birds on a weekly or bimonthly basis is critical to detecting a mite problem early. Mite indexing systems that assign a one digit number to various infestation levels from 1 to >25,000 mites per bird have been in
place for a number of years. However, they are often time consuming and require the examination of a fairly large number of birds to get an accurate estimation for the flock. A typical mite index may be similar to the following:

0 = no mites
1 = 1 to 50 mites (light infestation)
2 = 50 to 1,000 mites (moderate infestation) – small clumps of mites on skin and beginnings of discoloration and matting around feathers
3 = 1,000 to 25,000 mites (moderate to heavy infestation) – more discoloration and accumulation on feathers and around vent
4 = >25,000 mites (heavy infestation) – numerous large clumps of mites on skin and feathers and skin pocketed with scabs

Even though a one digit rating system based on the number of mites per bird has been the standard for years, a more practical system may be simply a “present” or “absent” designation on 7 to 30 birds per house in a weekly inspection group, with a percentage of birds with mites present used as a threshold (Stringham and Watson, 2003). The accuracy of your monitoring program will be better when more (rather than fewer) birds are examined each week (inspecting 25 birds will likely give a more accurate accounting vs. inspecting 10 birds per house).

In a flock of breeder birds, the roosters often have higher populations of northern fowl mites than do the hens (Axtell and Arends, 1990). Mites readily spread from the roosters to the hens. Therefore, during monitoring of breeder flocks, roosters should be examined at a higher ratio to the hens. To date, a vaccine to provide the birds with immunity to mites has not been developed.

**TREATMENT OPTIONS LIMITED**

Treatment for mites is difficult, expensive, and may be only partially successful. Unfortunately, mites have developed at least partial resistance to many of the chemicals used to treat an infestation. Furthermore, there do not appear to be any new promising substitute products for mite control becoming available any time soon. As a result, some producers are resorting to a product from the past to treat mites in the present. Sulfur has been used as a miticide in the past and is being used again in certain parts of the country with some degree of success (Clark, 2013). Compared to many other products, sulfur is inexpensive and relatively easy to apply but it has to be done correctly and even then may provide only partial suppression of mite infestations.

Unfortunately, however, many growers are allergic to sulfur or they use it wrong. They may “dust” it in with a back pack blower and their fans but this gives poor coverage on the birds where the mites actually live and few growers treat a second time 7 days or so later (Hubbard, 2013). Some growers may even go this far and may simply open several bags of sulfur in the house and expect the chickens to “dust themselves.” For the most part, this will not occur at a level considered effective. In addition, the dust formulation method of treatment may not place the active ingredient directly on the bird’s skin where it will do the most good. Furthermore, products used to kill mites do not kill the eggs, so you have to come back in a few days and treat again (Hubbard, 2013). The short life cycle (7 days) means that if you wait more than about 7 days before treating a second time, a whole new generation of mites have developed from hatched eggs that were unaffected by the initial treatment. Growers often only treat once when it may take at least 3 treatments strategically spaced close together to get all the mites from recent hatchings.

Another product that has yielded varying degrees of success has been diatomaceous earth (DE). Diatomaceous earth is believed to be a natural insect control powder. It is obtained from deposits of diatomite, which are the fossilized sedimentary layers of tiny phytoplankton called diatoms. DE is a form of amorphous silica that can kill insects by desiccation, by absorbing the oily or waxy cuticle layer by direct contact (Jacob et al., 2011). When the thin, waterproof layer is lost, the insect loses water and dies. In addition to its desiccant action, DE works abrasively to rupture insect cuticles. However, like sulfur, when used as a dust, it may not reach the bird’s skin where the mites live. Also, a single treatment will likely not get all the mites that hatch after the initial treatment is applied and therefore, the infestation may quickly re-establish itself unless multiple treatments are used at strategically spaced intervals.

In some breeder flocks where nothing else seems to work, extra label use of ivermectin has proven an effective method of control for the northern fowl mite. Like other products, it appears to work best when at least two treatments are made a few days apart. It is expensive but may be cost effective depending on the severity of the problem, especially if other options have been exhausted with little or no results. It can sometimes be difficult to keep in solution and has to be used with propylene glycol but even more important, ivermectin is not labeled for use on poultry (Hubbard, 2013).

Therefore, it requires a script from a licensed veterinarian before it can be used on breeder flocks because it is being used extra label.

**SUMMARY**

Northern fowl mites are a serious threat to breeder and layer flocks not only in Mississippi but throughout North America. Control depends first and foremost on prevention. Take every precaution to reduce the risk of establishing a fowl mite infestation on your farm. Treatment options are limited and may be only partially effective, making prevention even more important.

**REFERENCES**


Hubbard, S. A. 2013. Clinical Professor and D.V.M., Poultry Research and Diagnostic Lab, Pearl, MS. Personal communication.


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John Deere 5085E tractor

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Jones County Junior College recently received a $1,600 student recruitment grant from the USPOULTRY Foundation. The check was presented by Pic Billingsley, director of development and engineering for Sanderson Farms and USPOULTRY board member, to Tim Ishee, Agriculture and Science instructor for Jones County Junior College in Mississippi. Assisting in the presentation were Dr. Jesse Smith, president of Jones County Junior College, and Mark Leggett, president of the Mississippi Poultry Association.

“We are very thankful for the generosity of the USPOULTRY Foundation and for the grant we received to help expose more students to careers in the poultry industry,” said Ishee.

The USPOULTRY Foundation board approved student recruiting grants totaling more than $183,000 to the six U.S. universities with poultry science departments and 14 other institutions with industry-related programs. The Foundation provides annual recruiting funds to colleges and universities to attract students to the poultry industry.

The USPOULTRY Foundation’s mission is to support the recruitment and training of the brightest students, seek and fund scientific research, foster student scientists and promote careers in the poultry and egg industry.
UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 16, 2014
SPRING BROILER SEMINAR
Jones County Junior College, College Drive, Ellisville, C. L. Neil Student Center (see page 1 for details)

APRIL 10, 2014
THE MAGNOLIA BEEF AND POULTRY EXPO
Smith County Ag Complex, Raleigh (see page 15 for details)

APRIL 23, 2014
SPRING BROILER SEMINAR
Copiah Lincoln Community College, Wesson, The Thames Center (see page 1 for details)

APRIL 30, 2014
SPRING BROILER SEMINAR
Roosevelt State Park, Morton, The Alfreda-Harris Lodge (see page 1 for details)

AUGUST SEMINARS TBA

OCTOBER SEMINARS TBA

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