

Northampton County Poultry Study Group
Meeting Minutes – June 29, 2011

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Sam Long at approximately 6:00 p.m. Present were:

Sam Long	County Supervisor
Sandra Benson	Director of Planning & Zoning
Butch Nottingham	Agricultural Committee & Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Svcs
Rick Felker	Agricultural Committee & Mattawoman Creek Farms
Bill Jardine	Agricultural Committee & Quail Cove Farms
Hank Bowen	Aquaculture Committee
Tom Gallivan	Aquaculture Committee
Mike Peirson	Aquaculture Committee
Brian Terry	New Inlet (and substitute member to Aquaculture Committee)
Art Schwarzschild	Site Director, Anheuser-Busch Coastal Research Center of UVA
Bill Satterfield	Executive Director, Delmarva Poultry Industry, Inc.
Andrew McLean	Duart Farm of MD, Mull Farm of MD and PNC Bank
Gregg Bailey	G&M Sales of Delmarva, Inc.
Heather Lusk	HM Terry Co.
Jennifer Bramble	MidAtlantic Farm Credit
Jim Karsnitz	Cumberland
Peter Henderson	Shellfish Aquaculture
Andrew Diggs	Oyster Grower
Kenneth Walker	JC Walker Bros.
David Burden	VA Eastern Shorekeeper

Sandra Benson, Director of Planning & Zoning, distributed copies of and reviewed Accomack County's regulations for confined poultry facilities. The committee was provided with a graphic prepared by Planning & Zoning staff which depicted Accomack's regulations to the extent possible on a Northampton County base map. She also provided information from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation about requirements for land application of poultry litter and noted that Nutrient Management Plans are required for agricultural cost-share programs as of the second year of participation.

Bill Satterfield stated that about a week after the May committee meeting the manufacturer of arsenic-containing feed suspended sale and use of the feed. He said that Tyson has continued to use the feed but that Perdue had not used it for some years. He noted that copper is an essential element for the chickens and that the literature indicates that copper stays on the soil. Tom Gallivan stated that recent rain events indicate that soil does not always stay in place.

Mr. Long questioned whether data is available on the number of acres in the county on which poultry litter is applied. Butch Nottingham reminded the group that the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) oversees agricultural fertilizer application.

Mike Peirson stated that the biggest environmental concern is the stockpiling and/or concentration of poultry litter rather than what happens after the litter has been applied to fields. A member of the group noted that there are limits on how long manure may be stored outside uncovered; for Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) the limit is 14 days. Mr. Satterfield stated that manure is not removed from the houses after every flock, so that in many cases it would be 4-5 years before manure would need to be stored, although Perdue cleans their houses once a year.

Dave Burden expressed concern that Nutrient Management Plans are not tied to specific parcels and that disinterested third parties could not get information regarding individual compliance with plans, so that the county must rely on state agencies to do their jobs. Hank Bowen stated that only a small amount of copper in the water body could damage clams.

Mr. Long stated that the Board's goal is to determine impacts of poultry operations so that informed decisions can be made to protect the local aquaculture industry while also providing more opportunities to the agricultural community.

Mr. Satterfield stated that Perdue officials had indicated that at this time they are not interested in building houses in Northampton County. He also said that other Delmarva companies do not come down even as far south as Accomack County. Mr. Nottingham stated the opinion that if farmers' opportunities are limited they may be more inclined to sell their land for development.

It was estimated that less than 10% of the county's farm acreage could be fertilized with the litter produced, assuming 50 houses, 244 tons per house, and application at a rate of 3 tons per acre. Andrew McLean stated that in his experience the use of poultry manure increases corn yields which then become chicken feed. Messrs. Long and Nottingham concurred that there are no local farms using manure exclusively for fertilizer.

Bill Jardine stated the view that it might be important to distinguish between farm owners doing other farming on their land and those who would put up chicken houses but do not otherwise farm. It was noted that the producer has limitations on manure storage but that the end user does not.

Mr. Peirson stated that as long as copper is bound to the soil it does not pose a threat to clams but that it begins to affect clam eggs at 20 parts per billion. He and Mr. Bowen concurred that the unknown is the worry.

It was the consensus of the group that NRCS representatives and Nutrient Management planners should be invited to the next meeting to discuss state and federal regulations and requirements.

Dr. Schwarzschild stated that nutrient levels on the seaside are very low so that the threshold at which increases would be noticed is very low. He expressed concern about 100-year storm events and other impacts that could severely damage aquaculture activities. Rick Felker questioned whether or not any sort of risk assessment had been done. Discussion ensued regarding the personal and community economics, including multiplier effects, of chicken houses. Mr. Peirson stated the view that since all fields are going to be fertilized the best approach to the issue is to determine what the problems are and then evaluate solutions to those problems.

Pete Henderson stated that he is concerned about uncovered manure. Mr. Gallivan pointed out that few water bodies produce shellfish as consistently as local waters and that he is concerned about harmful algal blooms. He noted that the aquaculture community also must deal with NIMBY issues, which are becoming more prevalent.

Dave Burden questioned why the Eastern Shore is a good place to grow chickens. The response included the factors of climate, good workers, availability of corn, and market location.

The next meeting was scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on July 27, 2011. The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.