

Poultry Team Outcomes & Impact Report 2025

Poultry Processor Meeting

Program Objectives

The 2025 Poultry Processor Workshop, held in Cleveland, Alabama, was developed to strengthen regulatory knowledge, technical capacity, and decision-making among poultry processing professionals. The program focused on improving participants' understanding of the United States Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA FSIS) Noncompliance Reports, including how to recognize common noncompliance record(NR) scenarios and effectively navigate the appeal process. A key objective was to enhance consistency and confidence in carcass condemnation decisions through applied, hands-on training. The workshop also aimed to prepare industry stakeholders for potential changes to poultry performance standards while sharing best practices for continuous improvement programs that emphasize internal communication and critical thinking. Finally, the program sought to disseminate current research and industry insights related to broiler breast myopathies, particularly woody breast and spaghetti breast, and their impacts on yield and product quality.

Outcomes

The 2025 Poultry Processor Meeting served 38 attendees from 17 different poultry integrators or allied industry companies that do business in the state of Alabama. The program helped reduce uncertainty and mitigate compliance-related risks for participating establishments. Hands-on condemnation training enhanced participants' ability to apply inspection criteria accurately and confidently, supporting more consistent decision-making on the processing floor. The workshop reinforced the role of land-grant universities and Extension as trusted, science-based partners to the poultry industry.



Figure 1. Boneless, skinless whole chicken breast.

Worthwhile Operational Guidelines & Suggestions (WOGS) Newsletter

Program Objectives

The primary objective of the Worthwhile Operational Guidelines & Suggestions (WOGS) newsletter is to deliver timely, science-based, and practically relevant information to poultry processing professionals. The newsletter is designed to translate research findings, regulatory considerations, and emerging industry challenges into actionable guidance that can be implemented at the processing plant level.

The WOGS newsletter is distributed to more than 450 contacts from more than 20 countries around the globe. The regular distribution ensures that information remains current and responsive to industry needs, while the extensive archive serves as a durable educational resource.



WORTHWHILE OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES & SUGGESTIONS

Figure 2. Worthwhile Operational Guidelines & Suggestions newsletter

Feed Milling Workshop

Program Objectives

Proper training of feed mill personnel is one of the most effective ways to reduce manufacturing costs, improve feed quality, and enhance animal performance. The feed mill professionals who participate in our educational programs collectively oversee the production of approximately 200,000 tons of feed per week, representing more than 10 million tons annually. At this scale, even small improvements in operational efficiency can have a substantial economic impact. For example, a modest reduction of only \$0.50 per ton through improved grinding efficiency, pellet mill performance, energy utilization, ingredient management, or process control would generate an estimated \$5 million in annual savings for the industry.

To address the growing need for workforce development and continuing education, the poultry team delivers year-round training opportunities through a combination of hands-on workshops, industry seminars, webinars, on-site consultations, technical publications, and online educational resources. These programs are specifically designed to support both newly hired personnel and experienced feed mill managers seeking to optimize plant performance and stay current with industry best practices.

A cornerstone of these efforts is the Auburn University Feed Milling Workshop, which provides practical instruction on ingredient receiving, grinding, batching and mixing, conditioning, pelleting, cooling, quality control, feed safety, and process optimization. Participants gain both technical knowledge and real-world applications that can be immediately implemented within their operations. Through these educational initiatives, feed milling personnel develop the skills necessary to improve operational efficiency, enhance feed quality, reduce manufacturing costs, and support animal performance and profitability.

The program continues to attract strong participation from both domestic and international companies, serving as a valuable platform for knowledge transfer, professional networking, and the dissemination of best practices across the global feed manufacturing industry. By strengthening the technical expertise of feed mill personnel, these efforts contribute directly to the long-term competitiveness, sustainability, and success of the feed and poultry industries.



Figure 3. Feed milling workshop participants below and on the feed mill equipment inside the Auburn University Feed Mill.

Unlock Your Potential

Program Objectives

The “Unlock Your Potential” workshop helped participants identify their leadership and communication strengths and improve their skills to be successful in the poultry industry. To discover their personal strengths, participants completed the CliftonStrengths assessment, a research-backed tool that enhances self-awareness and team dynamics. Tom Lewis from Poultry Guard shared an impactful presentation focusing on enhancing verbal and written communication, drawing on his extensive experience in the poultry industry. Three engaging activities were provided to participants by Lisa Kensler of the Auburn University College of Education to help them understand how their talent strengths can aid their decision-making, problem-solving, and collaboration. Led by Bill Dozier, Alabama Extension poultry specialist, the workshop participants engaged in one-on-one and team-based poultry industry-related scenarios to apply their talent strengths to problem-solving.

Outcomes

The poultry team welcomed twenty attendees from Alabama, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas. Participants found this workshop applicable to their positions, enabling them to implement new strategies to enhance communication and leadership in live production and processing. Approximately 73% of the participants indicated that the workshop exceeded their expectations and 80% would strongly recommend it to colleagues and friends. The participants indicated by the learning outcomes how they would apply the knowledge learned to improve communication with their employees.

Some of the testimonials from participants on implementing what they learned at the conference included ways to communicate more effectively with employees and customers. “I plan to help build my relationships across the board, using my talents to grow relationships, utilize my personal strengths to be a more effective communicator and leader, and I plan to enhance each strength I have to become a manager.” Participants found this workshop applicable to their positions, enabling them to implement new strategies to enhance communication and leadership in live production and processing.



Figure 4. Workshop attendees learn to identify and improve communication and leadership skills in Unlock Your Potential.

Hatchery Management Conference

Program Objectives

On July 23, broiler integrator personnel came together to learn about improving hatchery management, egg handling techniques, and chick quality.

Outcomes

The Hatchery Management Conference attracted approximately 43 participants with about 70% indicating that they would strongly recommend this workshop to colleagues and participants. Some of the testimonials on how to implement the information learned in the conference included the following:

- Helping customers troubleshoot moisture loss and egg handling
- Measuring moisture loss and chick yield to help better manage chick quality
- Better communicating with employees to help improve hatchery management in their operation
- Sharing with the hatchery team the importance moisture loss and tray wash



Figure 5. The Hatchery Management Conference taught participants how to improve hatchery management, egg handling techniques, and chick quality .



Figure 6. The 2025 Pullet and Broiler Breeder Conference attracted attendees from ten states.

Pullet and Broiler Breeder Conference

Program Objectives

Broiler breeder personnel gathered on July 24 to focus on improving reproductive performance through brooding management, rearing uniformity, and fertility optimization.

Outcomes

The Pullet and Broiler Breeder Conference attracted seventy-eight participants from ten states. The poultry team expressed gratitude to everyone who attended, took part, and contributed to these events. Among the participants, 93% and 94% would recommend or strongly recommend that the conference met or exceeded expectations and would recommend or strongly recommend it to colleagues and friends. Some of the testimonials provided by the participants in response to how they would implement the information learned in the conference included the following:

- Introduce new language and communication to build a relationship with grower,
- Build better relationships with growers/being more aware on farm for sickness and treatment
- Look every day at live birds that may have issues, possibly seeing what is wrong and relaying that information to managers
- Implement information related to AMPV and male management on farms.



Figure 7. Alabama Extension Specialist Bill Dozier demonstrates an Avirobot inside a broiler house.

Assessing Autonomous Mobile Robot in Poultry Production to Improve Management Practices and Economic Impact

Program Objectives

Mobile robots (Avirobots from Apelie Robotics) have been used on commercial broiler farms in South America and Canada to evaluate broiler performance improvements. A paired house trial involving two broiler houses is evaluating the effectiveness of using Avirobots throughout a broiler growout on commercial farms in the southeastern United States. Bill Dozier, an Alabama Extension specialist, and collaborators are assessing the effects of implementing Avirobot in commercial broiler houses to improve management practices and economic impact.

Outcomes

Using Avirobots in commercial houses provided an advantage of final body weight and lower incidence of condemnations compared with broilers reared in control houses. Avirobots can cause chicks to move, thereby stimulating feed and water consumption, particularly during brooding. In addition to early movement during the growout, Avirobots can initiate birds to move creating a potential benefit of heat removal during times of high temperatures in summer production.

The mobile robot on the commercial broiler farm resulted in an increase in body weight and an improvement in the feed conversion ratio. Based on body weight and not counting feed conversion, this would provide an additional \$300 per house based on an additional 3,741-pound increase in total weight in the house with the robot. This results in approximately \$1,500 to \$1,800 benefit to the integrated poultry company for one house per flock.

Small Flock Poultry Program

Program Objectives

Keeping backyard chickens is now the nation's third largest pet industry behind cats and dogs with 13% of households keeping chickens. For Alabama, this translates to approximately 266,700 backyard flocks. This underserved audience wants to learn more about how to raise their flocks as well as how to keep them healthy and happy. Unfortunately, this Alabama constituency often turns to unreliable sources of information, such as social media, to receive instruction due to the lack of locally available, science-based information.

The small flock poultry program, overseen by Extension Specialist Brigid McCrea, held several in-person workshops throughout the state as invited and organized by county Extension coordinators. A total of nine presentations were scheduled on these topics: "Getting Started with Chickens" (four meetings for twenty-one people), "All About Eggs" (four meetings for forty people), and "Disease Prevention" (one meeting for fifteen people). Pumpkins and Poultry was a half day meeting attended by nine individuals at the Talladega County Extension office and planned in coordination with multiple Extension personnel with various areas of expertise. McCrea discussed pumpkins and their seeds for chickens. A presentation to the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) included information about different heritage breeds and their noncommercial, dietary needs. A discussion was also held concerning the terminology in the AAFCO guidebook being outdated and technically incorrect.

Three EXTV ads were created: "Natural Egg Dye," "August Egg Facts," and "Biosecurity for Small Flock Owners." The small flock poultry program took 48 phone calls from either small flock owners or from county Extension offices asking questions on behalf of small flock owners who came to or called the office. McCrea also wrote and submitted an article accepted by the Journal of Applied Poultry Research. The article's research was aimed at supporting decisions made by small flock owners on which heritage breeds to select for meat production.

Outcomes

For small flock owners (or future owners) who attended the presentations, there was a consistent increase in knowledge (60% in biosecurity; 52% in footbath usage; 70% in overall disease prevention; 40% in overall chicken knowledge; 45% in space requirements; 33% in egg myths; 75% in Alabama egg laws; 27% in egg nutrients; 54% in grading and sizing eggs; and 42% in overall egg knowledge).



Figure 8. Brigid McCrea, Extension specialist, explains the use of pumpkin seeds for poultry at Pumpkins & Poultry in the Talladega County Extension office.



Brigid McCrea, *Extension Specialist*, Poultry, Auburn University

For more information, contact your county Extension office. Visit aces.edu/directory.

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