

CPRC Update – January 2015

Challenges of On-Farm Trials

Poultry producers have become interested in being involved in on-farm trials to test research discoveries in a commercial production setting. While conducting research trials in specialized facilities that mimic commercial circumstances is one option, these facilities are built specifically to test research results and may not provide the variety of conditions that would be found on commercial farms.

Research is designed to further the poultry industry and ensure its long-term viability and trials on commercial operations are important to meet those objectives. However, on-farm research trials require compromises on the part of the poultry producer. Risks that may have a negative impact on production or product quality are part of all research. Producers have to be aware of potential production and other risks that might result from a research trial on their farm and discuss how those risks will be managed with the researcher.

Poultry producers commit to an on-farm trial for the length of the research project. Research is generally conducted by changing one or a few production activities (e.g.: feed formulation, reduction in antibiotics, etc.) and measuring how the changes impact the research flock. The research flock is compared to other flocks that are produced under the farm's normal system (control flocks). Changes in flock management or other production activities (e.g.: feed formulation, lighting, etc.) cannot be made to either the research or control flocks during the research period without consultation with the researcher. Small production or management changes need to be accounted for in the measurement of research impacts and significant changes can completely derail the project leading to wasted money and effort.

Poultry producers who want to take part in on-farm trials can take steps to ensure that their experience is positive.

- Talk to other farmers that have been involved in on-farm research trials. What was their experience? How did they prepare? How was the communication with the researcher? What should they have done differently?
- Remember that researchers are not commercial poultry farmers. While they may be very knowledgeable about poultry, few will have a good understanding of how a commercial poultry farm operates.
- Ensure that the research is at an appropriate stage for on-farm trials. Talk to the researcher and industry specialists (e.g.: provincial poultry specialists, producer organization staff) to make sure that an on-farm trial is the next step in the research process. This will reduce the risk of failure or unexpected production problems.
- Ensure that communication is “two-way” so that the researcher understands how the project requirements may impact the poultry farm operations and management. Compromises may have to be made by both the farmer and researcher to meet both production and research requirements. Research is a specialized and very structured activity and a producer must have a clear understanding of researcher expectations so potential issues are identified.
- Make sure that research requirements are clearly understood by management and that staff are aware of their responsibilities to the project.

- Develop a clear risk-management plan to ensure that problems are identified early, the research team is quickly made aware of a developing problem and the farm business is not unduly damaged if problems occur. The risk-management plan should include details of compensation if the research trials cause negative financial impacts on the farm business.

On-farm research trials are important to proving the value of research discoveries before they are adopted by industry as a whole. Properly designed and managed trials will help industry adopt discoveries quickly and efficiently.

CPRC has begun a consultation process designed to develop recommended guidelines for planning and performing on-farm trials. This effort will involve input from a wide range of stakeholders, including producers, producer organizations, researchers, regulators, statisticians and others. This approach will ensure that potential issues are identified and addressed in the guidelines.

For more details on any CPRC activities, please contact The Canadian Poultry Research Council, 350 Sparks Street, Suite 1007, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7S8, phone: (613) 566-5916, fax: (613) 241-5999, email: info@cp-rc.ca, or visit us at www.cp-rc.ca.

The membership of the CPRC consists of Chicken Farmers of Canada, Canadian Hatching Egg Producers, Turkey Farmers of Canada, Egg Farmers of Canada and the Canadian Poultry and Egg Processors' Council. CPRC's mission is to address its members' needs through dynamic leadership in the creation and implementation of programs for poultry research in Canada, which may also include societal concerns.