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Q: What Has Happened Since 2005?

Morison’s contract as poultry grower terminated

1. Main reason: Did not agree to new upgrades
   - Integrator demanded major “upgrades” to poultry houses
     - Modified to tunnel ventilation system
     - Complete enclosure of house
     - No natural light or fresh air allowed in
     - Energy-intensive heat and exhaust systems
   - Cost: $150,000
   - Increase in energy use up to three times use for current housing
   - Methods not better for chickens than current housing
Q: What Has Happened Since 2005?

2. Secondary reason: Film crew allowed access to the farm
   - Integrator complained that growers did not follow proper measures to ensure “biosecurity,” i.e., signing visitor log in mailbox installed by integrator
   - No existing or potential biosecurity threats at the time (i.e., avian flu)
Q: Were “Upgrades” Necessary for Increasing Profits?

- No!

- For flock just prior to termination of contract, the Morisons earned “Outstanding Producer” award
Q: What about Other Growers?

- Have other growers been given same contract demands?
  - Yes, but it’s comply or no more chickens
  - Some refuse—10 other growers refused to make similar “upgrades” to their poultry houses and therefore lost their contracts, too
    - Out of approximately 800 growers for this particular integrator
    - Total of 1,600 growers on the Eastern Shore
  - Some comply and do the upgrades
    - If still heavily in debt, growers must comply by taking out additional loans on properties (farms *and homes*)
    - Reporting increased electricity costs
    - Low or no rate of return on investment
Poultry Farms on Lower Maryland Eastern Shore

Map source: USDA, adapted by Jay Graham.
Which Growers Are Able to Refuse?

Who are the growers who refuse to make modifications to their poultry houses?

- Many are ready to give up business
- Have paid enough on their poultry house debts to afford terminating their growers’ contracts
- Have other sources of income, so no longer need to grow chickens to recoup investments
- Almost all growers have jobs off the farm
Q: What Is the Situation with Confidentiality Clauses?

- Poultry contract confidentiality clauses

- Previously:
  - Confidentiality clauses in growers contracts (growers unable to review contracts with anyone, even their lawyers)
  - These have been removed from contracts between the integrators and growers
  - Complaints filed with USDA by growers

- Currently:
  - Growers now given three days to review contracts prior to signing
  - Not much choice or leverage to refuse to sign contracts or modify contracts
Q: Why Do Farmers Keep Growing Chickens?

- Pride! A farmer does not want to be the first generation to lose a family farm

- Once involved, farmers need to keep on in the chicken business until loans are paid off

- **Mortgage** is the key: Banks structure the commercial loans for building chicken houses to include land, poultry houses, *and* home as collateral. (If you lose the business before loans are paid off, you lose everything—land, home, business.)

- Profits from selling the land and the farm will not cover investments that have been made
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Q: Describe Current Growers on the Eastern Shore

- New growers mostly immigrants
  - Many are Asian and Pakistani

- USDA, through socially disadvantaged incentive programs, provides low-interest loans and tax relief to immigrant farmers on purchases of small farms
Q: Any Regrets?

- Do you regret any decisions over the past 20 years?
  - No regrets for taking a stand to gain better conditions for contract growers and poultry workers over the past 15 years
  - No regrets ending the contract and ending work as a chicken grower
Q: What Accomplishments Are You Most Proud Of?

- Increasing awareness among all types of workers in poultry industry and surrounding communities about resources available to help them

- Creating a forum for the voiceless within the industry to address their issues

- Participation in research on antibiotic use and antibiotic resistance in poultry products, houses, workers, and community members
Q: Are You Still Involved with DPJA?

- Are you still involved with the Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance (DPJA)?
  - Resigned in 2006 as executive director of DPJA to work nationally on the same issues
  - Currently consulting for SRAP (Socially Responsible Agriculture Project)
    - http://www.sraproject.org/
  - Shifted focus from working on problems from the inside of the industrial poultry system to working on solutions—sustainable agriculture alternatives
Q: What Has Become of the DJPA?

- The DPJA has dissolved as an organization

- Narrowed focus to workers’ issues only—whereas previously concerns included the entire industry (growers, workers, community, and the environment)

- IRS rejected its application for nonprofit status, saying it functioned too much like a worker organization

- Industry was not involved in the dissolving of the alliance
Q: Is an Organization Like the DPJA Still Needed?

- Yes

- Its main strength was in bringing together diverse stakeholders—growers, catchers, poultry plant workers, community members, and environmentalists.

- It addressed a wide variety of issues:
  - Worker health and safety
  - Environmental protection of local water and air resources
  - Public health issues, such as antibiotic resistance
  - Alternative food production methods
  - Working with the scientific community
Q: What Were Some DPJA Accomplishments?

- What were some of the accomplishments of the DPJA?
  - Bringing together stakeholders for the first time
  - Increasing awareness and appreciation among various stakeholders about each others’ issues and concerns
  - Improving contract details for growers
  - Improved conditions for poultry workers and catchers
  - Brainstorming solutions to address problems
  - Support research on public health and environmental threats, such as the use of antibiotics as growth promoters
  - Contributing to decreased use of antibiotics and perhaps arsenic in chicken production
Q: What Are You Doing Now?

- Consultant for Socially Responsible Agriculture Project (SRAP), with a focus on Chesapeake Bay watershed
  - http://www.sraproject.org/

- Focus on finding alternatives to the industrial agriculture system
  - More sustainable agriculture practices
  - Local/regional production and marketing for crops and food animal production
  - Organic agriculture

- Helping farmers making the transition from industrial or conventional agriculture to more sustainable agriculture
  - Helps farmers and communities
  - Helps consumers by providing healthier food
Finding Models That Are Successful

- Farmer cooperatives

- Connecting farmers and consumers

- Mobile meat processing units
  - Addresses the need that smaller, independent and organic farmers have in finding processors (slaughterhouses) that are not owned by integrators
Q: What Will You Do With Your Farm?

- Possible free-range or organic poultry production

- Considering heritage vegetable row crops
  - Non-GMO seeds
  - Seeds can be saved and replanted year after year
  - Protects biodiversity in the environment
  - Expands varieties available in market
“In the 1600s, Maryland became known for its production of tobacco, a crop that would have a significant impact on the state’s agricultural, social, and political history. During the eighteenth century, Maryland’s increase in wheat production and ability to provide food for troops during the War of Independence led to its reputation as the “Breadbasket of the Revolution.” From the end of the Revolution through the 1800s, the dairy, fruit, vegetable, and livestock industries experienced cycles of growth and decline, as farmers faced obstacles such as the wheat-infesting Hessian fly and a depletion of soil quality.”

— The Agriculture History of Maryland, University of Maryland Libraries

http://www.lib.umd.edu/agriculture/usain/mdhistory.html
Parting Words

- Long, difficult struggle trying to change the system from the inside

- Termination of the contract by the integrator could be viewed by some as a loss, but much has been gained

- Lost the battle, but not the war!

- Refreshing to not work under the stress of the integrators’ contract and the constant threat of contract termination

- Rewarding to work on the solutions side of the poultry production issue

- There is much more work to do!