

Recent Alabama Broiler Litter Usage Changes

Over time, regional and local overuse of broiler litter in Alabama has led to high soil phosphorus levels in some areas and the potential for ground water pollution. This has led the public to believe that Alabama has an over abundance of chicken litter, when much of the State could and still can use the soil nutrients if litter transportation were more convenient. This has been partially accomplished over the last several years through the EQIP funding program and the Certified Waste Vendor program. Recently, external influences have led to changing patterns of broiler litter use as fertilizer, and these changes may be of interest to those monitoring water quality in agricultural areas. Shortages of replacement bedding sources (primarily pine shavings and peanut hulls) have forced broiler growers to develop methods to reuse litter for longer periods. Techniques such as high speed tilling, windrow composting and litter treatments are being adopted to manage litter for reuse for long periods of time. Consequently, less litter has been available for land application than in the past. At the same time, high crude oil (and consequently fertilizer) prices have increased demand for broiler litter amongst crop and hay farmers. Although this may spur the usage of litter to some extent, the price of nutrients in general will help to insure that the litter is not overused. Also, the widespread use of the feed enzyme phytase has decreased phosphorus output in the litter by 20-25%, bringing litter phosphorus levels more in line with the nitrogen levels present in used broiler litter. This will allow litter use with less buildup of phosphorus over time. In conclusion, less broiler litter is being land applied as replacement bedding sources have become scarce and expensive. Broiler growers are using a range of litter management techniques to reuse litter for extended periods of time, allowing for better management of litter use as a soil amendment.

Presenter:

Joseph Hess

hessjos@auburn.edu

Poultry Science Department, Auburn University

Co-authors:

Joseph Hess, John Blake, and Kenneth Macklin

Poultry Science Department, Auburn University