

SEMINOLE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
NOVEMBER 5, 2025
2:00 P.M.
Courthouse Annex

Educational Session on Poultry Industry Practices and Local Impacts

Welcome

The Seminole County Board of Commissioners held an educational session on the poultry industry on Wednesday, November 5, 2025, at 2:00 PM at the Courthouse Annex located at 230 Cherry Street, Donalsonville, GA. The session was held to provide information about breeder chicken houses, their environmental impact, and regulatory requirements.

Introductions

Meeting participants introduced themselves. Those present were:

Paula Granger (County Manager), Darius Culverson (Vice Chairman, Seminole County Board of Commissioners), Dr. Casey Ritz (University of Georgia Poultry Science Department), Mike Giles (Georgia Poultry Federation, joining remotely), Gates Rodiman and Serena Broska (Georgia DNR EPD), Justin Odom (Seminole County Extension Agent), Stan Kennedy (Zoning Board Member), Debbie Odom (Zoning Board Member), Bill Mills (County Attorney), Billy Shingler (Attorney for Luu), Shelia Williams (Chairman, Seminole County Board of Commissioners), Greg Long (Code Enforcement Officer), and property owners Neil Spooner and Tammy Reese Grimsley.

Purpose of Session

Chairman Williams explained the purpose of the meeting was to clarify answers to questions and/or concerns regarding the chicken breeder houses and possible environmental impacts. County Manager Granger explained that she had put together a simple agenda because they wanted people to be able to talk freely. She emphasized this was not a decision-making meeting but strictly for informational purposes so everyone could be on the same page about poultry farming in Seminole County. She noted that while they didn't currently have any poultry operations, years ago they probably did, and now that they were in range of the Tyson plant in Camilla, more people would want to do this. County Manager Granger stressed the need for consistency in planning and voting processes.

Discussion from Participants

Mr. Mike Giles, Georgia Poultry Federation

Mike Giles, appearing virtually, apologized for not being there in person but emphasized the importance of coming to a better understanding through questions and answers. He introduced the Georgia Poultry Federation as a trade association established in 1951 that represents the poultry industry at local, state, and federal levels.

Giles provided an overview of Georgia's poultry industry, stating that Georgia is the leading broiler-producing state in the nation with about a \$40 billion economic impact annually and approximately 130,000 jobs depending on the industry either directly or indirectly. He noted they produce about 1.35 billion chickens per year, translating to about 8 billion pounds or 31 million pounds daily.

Regarding location, Giles explained that contrary to the impression that poultry is concentrated in North Georgia where the industry began, 107 of Georgia's 159 counties have commercial poultry facilities at the farm level - nearly 70 percent. Drawing a line across I-20 from South

Carolina to Alabama, about 70 percent of production is above that line in what could be called North Georgia, but the 30 percent in middle would still rank as a top 10 producing state if it were separate.

Giles detailed how the industry is organized around "complexes" - a processing plant, feed mill, hatchery, and all growers in a multi-county area that supply that plant. Georgia has 18 complexes, with the one in Camilla being relevant to the potential contract grower being discussed.

He explained the three different types of farms in broiler production systems: pullet farms (where baby chicks are raised to sexual maturity), breeder farms (where fertilized eggs are produced), and broiler farms (where chickens are raised for meat). He noted that breeder farms, which was the subject of the meeting, receive birds at about 22-24 weeks old from pullet farms.

Giles then addressed avian influenza, explaining that the current outbreak started February 8, 2022, surpassing the 2015 outbreak that was previously considered the largest and most costly foreign animal disease outbreak in U.S. history. He noted this virus has behaved differently, persisting since 2022 rather than going away in summer as previous strains did. The virus originated in Asia and is carried primarily by wild waterfowl, though it has infected other species including some mammals.

For Georgia specifically, Giles reported good news - while 182 million birds have been impacted nationally across 843 commercial and over 968 backyard poultry farms, Georgia has only had three cases within the broader production system: two in January in Elbert County and one in Gordon County detected recently. He emphasized the swift response and cooperation with state and federal partners.

Giles warned about vultures as potential disease carriers, noting evidence suggests vultures have been the likely suspect in Georgia's detections. He urged anyone seeing sick or dying vultures on their property to notify DNR. Regarding cattle, he stressed that while dairy cows in other states have been infected with reduced milk production, there have been no cases in beef cattle operations anywhere in the United States, despite beef and poultry operations often going hand-in-hand, especially in North Georgia.

He concluded by explaining that every flock is tested for avian influenza before processing, describing it as a virus that "doesn't really hide very well" with vast mortality becoming apparent within a day or two of incubation. The response involves USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service as the lead agency, with Georgia Department of Agriculture leading operations and multiple other state agencies involved.

Dr. Casey Ritz, University of Georgia

Dr. Ritz focused on environmental challenges and opportunities on poultry farms, beginning with nutrient management planning. He explained that all farmers and companies have had nutrient management planning training for several decades, teaching best management practices for accountability of nutrients produced and matching need with farm capacity for appropriate recycling on or off the farm.

He detailed that nutrient management plans are often required by companies, and many lending agencies require them before issuing poultry housing loans. Dr. Ritz explained Georgia's Agricultural Stormwater Exemption, noting that because dry manure is not regulated by federal or state government, nutrient management plans help keep farmers compliant. Without such plans, a stormwater event where manure reaches surface water could require farmers to fall under federal point source pollution prevention programs.

Dr. Ritz outlined the components of nutrient management plans including nutrient generation calculations, soil and manure analysis, calibrated manure spreaders, proper bird disposal, site-specific soil conservation control with setbacks from streams, and detailed record-keeping. He mentioned that in South Georgia, incineration and composting are the primary disposal methods for dead birds. Dr. Ritz referenced the Poultry Environmental Quality Handbook (public website

published by UGA) which is an archive of publications outlining best management practices that have been used by the poultry industry for many years.

Discussing the value of poultry manure, Dr. Ritz emphasized it's not considered waste by growers but rather utilized on property or sold to others. He noted significant amounts of litter produced in North Georgia make it to South Georgia cotton fields and row cropping as an economical fertilizer source. Most farmers clean houses only once annually due to bedding expenses, with material potentially going on or off property. Dr. Ritz clarified that no manure flows out from under houses and into creeks because it is a “dry manure” operation.

Dr. Ritz then addressed local ordinances, explaining that in North Georgia where commercial poultry has existed since the 1950s, counties have implemented setbacks to allow both property owners on boundaries to be successful. In the top 10 producing counties, setbacks range from 100-500 feet from property lines, 300-600 feet from off-property residences, and 800-1500 feet from public facilities. Only 2 of the top 10 counties have conditional use permits, which tend to be rudimentary due to enforcement challenges.

He discussed odors and dust as predominant nuisance complaint components, citing a UGA study that found dust levels return to background levels by 500 feet from chicken houses, with ammonia quickly dissipating due to being lighter than air.

Mr. Gates Rodiman & Ms. Serena Broska, DNR

Gates Rodiman explained that DNR's concern is primarily with land disturbance during construction, as agricultural operations are exempt from their regulations. He outlined the permit process requiring plan submission to Atlanta for review and approval or denial, emphasizing they don't have a role until ground is broken and plans may never result in actual construction.

Remarks/Public Comments

Meeting participants had a detailed discussion regarding poultry industry practices and local impacts which addressed numerous questions and concerns:

Setbacks and Environmental Protection

Chairman Shelia Williams asked about setbacks from water sources. Dr. Ritz mentioned a 35-foot recommendation in nutrient management plans according to the NPDES permit (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System, a federal permitting program). County Manager Granger noted that Tyson requires a setback of 100 feet from streams, floodplains, sinkholes, and wetlands. Chairman Williams shared observations from her recent trip to Alabama, noting she saw cattle grazing right up against chicken houses with no fences, initially wondering about safety before learning this was standard practice with no documented bird flu cases in beef cattle.

Operations and Practices

Questions were raised about cattle grazing near chicken houses. Dr. Ritz confirmed there's no restriction separating beef cattle from poultry and no documented cases of bird flu in beef cattle. Meeting participants asked about the dry litter process. Dr. Ritz explained that chickens produce a combination of manure and urine in solid form, with bedding material used for absorption and padding. Inquiries were presented regarding inspection frequency. Participants discussed proper litter storage and insect/pest control, with DNR representatives noting that litter piles should be covered when stored. Dr. Ritz indicated that insects/pests were rarely a problem due to the way the chicken house is enclosed. He noted this is regulated by the Department of Agriculture rather than DNR. Dr. Ritz stated breeder houses typically receive weekly checks from company representatives, with strict biosecurity and inspection protocols in place (including, but not limited to, mortality, carcasses, and composting) due to the fact they are providing hatching eggs

which are “not cheap.” Attorney Billy Shingler noted Luu’s plan was to utilize an incinerator for carcass disposal and a separate building to contain litter, preventing exterior exposure.

Mr. Giles was asked to clarify that in cattle with avian flu there was no mortality, only a reduction in the production of milk and/or the quality of milk. Mr. Giles confirmed this and also stated that milk is monitored throughout the country and tested for the virus before entering the milk supply distributed to the public. County Manager Granger asked for clarification regarding stream pollution testing. Mr. Rodiman explained that plan submittals include sampling outfalls identified by engineers, with notices of intent specifying sampling requirements. He clarified they're concerned with turbidity (dirt in water) rather than pathogens, conducting periodic random inspections during construction. Sampling requirements only last as long as the permit when construction achieves final stabilization with grass on-site. Ms. Serena Broska added information about stream setbacks, explaining 25-foot buffers for warm water streams and 50-foot buffers for cold water streams, measured from the water's edge. Chairman Williams asked for clarification that permit applicants are required to receive approval from multiple authorities, with Seminole County Board of Commissioners only being the beginning of the various approval processes the applicant has to pass in order to conduct business. DNR representatives noted this was accurate and emphasized that local authorities can be more restrictive than state requirements, with local ordinances taking precedence. Ms. Broska explained that their permit becomes null and void if operators aren't in compliance with local ordinances, noting that state permits cannot supersede local requirements. County Manager Granger asked where to find a report showing wetlands in Seminole County. DNR representatives noted they usually use a federal wetlands map provided by the Fish and Wildlife Service which is currently down due to the recent government shutdown. Ms. Broska noted that wetlands that flow directly into waterways are subject to regulation by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as part of the review process. County Manager Granger asked where to find a map or any documentation showing sinkhole locations. Ms. Broska indicated there are a few outdated geological services maps that might help, noting these maps were primarily used to determine if an area was appropriate for landfills. She emphasized that determination if land is suitable for landfills is a “totally different” case.

EPD / LIA Process and Enforcement

Code Enforcement Officer, Greg Long, requested clarification on the site plan review process conducted by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD). Mr. Long asked whether, upon receiving construction and erosion control plans, the EPD provides recommendations relating to sediment control, erosion control, water flow management, holding ponds, and similar measures. Ms. Broska explained that EPD utilizes a standardized, self-regulating permit, approximately 42–52 pages in length, which outlines all required erosion and sediment control practices. Once an applicant submits the permit, pays the associated fees, and waits for the required 14-day period, construction may begin. Projects are then subject to inspections performed either by a Local Issuing Authority (LIA) or by EPD. She noted that EPD specialists maintain an inspection quota of approximately four inspections per month per specialist, rotating through various types of sites including chicken houses, DOT projects, solar farms, and commercial or residential construction. The primary focus of each inspection is ensuring that sediment is not leaving the site, as this is EPD’s highest priority. Ms. Broska further explained that all plans submitted by LIA, including those from Seminole County, are reviewed by EPD in Athens using a comprehensive checklist. Reviewers may issue detailed comments requiring corrections—such as improper sediment storage calculations—before approval is granted. Plans often undergo multiple resubmissions, though experienced consultants generally design their plans to exceed minimum requirements to streamline approval. Mr. Long then asked about his enforcement responsibilities as the LIA when violations are observed during site inspections. Representatives from DNR stated that Mr. Long is the primary authority for enforcement in Seminole County, with DNR available to provide guidance and support as needed. Joint inspections may be conducted upon request; however, DNR does not have the authority to issue “stop-work orders.” Mr. Rodiman shared his inspection experiences, stating he'd found some

violations at chicken house construction sites but nothing egregious - mainly issues with final stabilization progress. He mentioned one instance of improper composting that required correction, noting that most operators are compliant once they receive violation letters because they want to avoid trouble with the company while meeting strict requirements and monitoring by Tyson.

Manure Piles

County Manager Granger asked why there is so much more concern regarding chicken manure vs cow manure. DNR representatives indicated it may be due to E. coli bacteria and the fact that chicken manure is in large piles compared to cow manure, however, they noted there was no “concrete” answer to the question. Vice Chairman Culverson asked why piles of chicken manure throughout the state are not required to be covered. DNR representatives indicated they are supposed to be covered, and any complaints are regulated by the Department of Ag. County Manager Granger asked for clarification on Manure Handler Permits. Participants confirmed that individual sellers of chicken manure have to obtain a Manure Handler Permit. When Chairman Williams asked if there were time limits on spreading manure piles, Ms. Broska noted that the nutrient management plan covered those requirements.

Biosecurity Requirements and Other Business Aspects

Code Enforcement Officer Greg Long asked for clarification regarding biosecurity requirements within the poultry industry, noting that large companies such as Tyson maintain their own biosecurity divisions that develop best practices, monitor operations, and coordinate emergency response procedures. Dr. Ritz confirmed that the State works with a team of state and federal partners focused on preparation for avian influenza events. This group collaborates on biosecurity measures, response protocols, and coordination between agencies. Initial response typically begins at the state level, followed by federal involvement when issues of indemnity arise due to flock loss. He stated that individual poultry companies also maintain their own biosecurity standards, which are implemented by contracted farmers. He emphasized that strong biosecurity is in everyone’s best interest and is consistently practiced across the industry. Mr. Long added that members of the general public cannot freely access poultry operations. Visitors may be shown limited areas, but complete access is restricted and must be approved by the company. It was noted that most poultry farms are privately owned by individual farmers, not by the companies themselves. County Manager Granger reported that Tyson representatives shared specific requirements during prior discussions. Tyson allows no more than 3 egg houses or 8 broiler houses per property, and the property owner must reside on the property. She noted that the board had previously discussed potentially including a similar limitation within conditional use approvals. Tyson’s restrictions stem from past significant bird losses and reflect the company’s need to ensure that someone is continuously monitoring operations on-site. Participants further noted that growers are often under pressure because they must meet the requirements of both regulatory agencies and the poultry companies. Ms. Broska explained that when growers receive letters from the DNR, they are typically already stressed, as they are trying to become operational while simultaneously meeting strict company and regulatory standards. Questions arose regarding what happens after chicken houses go out of business. Dr. Ritz noted they are used for various activities including antiques, cattle, and scrap metal. Participants discussed the relationship between growers and companies, with Tyson owning the birds while farmers own the facilities and are responsible for daily care. Chairman Williams asked questions regarding the longevity of chicken houses. Dr. Ritz noted loans for chicken houses are usually based upon a 15-year payoff. Mr. Giles stated chicken houses often last 40 to 50 years, requiring maintenance over time, emphasizing that companies like Tyson only place chickens in well-maintained facilities. Mr. Long stated that Tyson, via conversations with company representatives, confirmed that chicken farming is a 7-day per week, hands-on industry with strict requirements. Mr. Long noted that farmers are the first line of defense for biosecurity and bird health with strict requirements imposed upon them by Tyson.

Emergency Situations

Vice Chairman Culverson inquired about responsibility during disasters like hurricanes. Mr. Giles explained that companies typically assist with equipment and personnel, working alongside government agencies for cleanup and disposal, referencing 150 chicken houses that Tyson stepped in and helped clean up after Hurricane Michael.

County Attorney Remarks

County Attorney Bill Mills began by acknowledging the valuable information provided. He systematically went through the issue and concerns before the board regarding permit applications, as presented by Catalyst Consulting, and asked participants to address each one:

- Distance between residences and poultry/breeder houses
- Air quality issues including ammonia, dust, bio aerosols, microorganisms, and endotoxins
- Water quality concerns about runoff into Dry Creek and Lake Seminole, including litter, wash water, nitrogen, phosphorus, and bacteria
- Soil and subsoil vulnerabilities with contaminants migrating through permeable layers
- Livestock health concerns, citing USDA recognition of a 6-mile control zone around poultry houses

Dr. Ritz addressed these concerns by reiterating that:

- Dust levels return to background levels within 500 feet.
- Operations are "dry" with no manure flowing out.
- Proper setbacks during land application minimize potential for nutrients entering surface waters.

Attorney Mills asked specific operational questions about breeder houses. Dr. Ritz noted that they are self-contained facilities housing typically 14,000 birds (hens and roosters at a 10:1 ratio) with combination scratch areas and elevated slats for nest boxes and feeders. When discussing air quality, Attorney Mills pressed for information about dust issues, with Dr. Ritz explaining the UGA study results showing dust returns to background levels by 500 feet. On water quality, Attorney Mills received clarification that no sediment ponds are needed during normal operations since it's a dry manure system. Ms. Broska noted that, during construction, sediment ponds are utilized to control any possible run-off. Attorney Mills explored DNR's authority regarding odor complaints, with DNR clarifying they don't regulate odors directly but can cite violations if the "source" of odors is associated with issues like open dumping or burning that they do regulate.

Q&A

County Manager Granger asked if any participants had more questions/concerns to address. Tammy Reese Grimsley and Billy Shingler were specifically asked if they had questions, with both indicating they did not. Mr. Rodiman offered business cards and asked if anyone had further questions, with everyone indicating they did not. Chairman Williams and Vice Chairman Culverson thanked participants for their time and efforts. Ms. Broska asked if this meeting was supposed to help with the issuance of conditional use permits. County Manager Granger indicated yes, noting that 3 applications were currently on file, 2 for broiler houses and 1 for egg houses. County Attorney Bill Mills summarized that the information gathered would help the commissioners and zoning board make decisions within their existing ordinance framework. He clarified that while they couldn't change ordinances for the pending permit application, conditional use permits could include additional restrictions to make requirements more stringent if necessary. Ms. Broska stated she was not familiar with all of the specific details; however, the Southwest District covers approximately 34 to 35 counties, and they periodically hear about local ordinances being modified, particularly regarding solar farms. She explained that some counties

are attempting to limit the number of solar installations by adopting stricter requirements. She added that there are also state-level restrictions, such as limits on the number of landfills within a given area. Ms. Broska concluded that part of ongoing responsibility is to learn, adapt, and remain in compliance while maintaining positive relationships with neighbors. Mr. Long emphasized that farmers are facing challenges requiring them to diversify in order to stay in business, noting that chicken farms are a productive way to diversify. Vice Chairman Culverson emphasized that this is the first conditional use permit for chicken houses the county has been asked to consider. He noted that since the process began, two additional permit requests have been submitted. He stated that each request may differ in nature, including location or other factors; however, the county must remain consistent in applying its ordinances. He stressed that no exceptions can be made and that consistency must be upheld, with Attorney Bill Mills confirming this position. Vice Chairman Culverson continued, explaining that because this is the first request of its kind, the board is seeking guidance and advice, as the process is new to everyone involved. County Manager Granger concluded the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. She remarked that the group had received a great deal of useful information and expressed appreciation for everyone's efforts in making the meeting possible. Vice Chairman Culverson also thanked everyone for maintaining a positive atmosphere, and the meeting was adjourned.