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Propane-Powered Sanitizer Helps Stop Avian Influenza

WASHINGTON, D.C. (October 19, 2005) – In the past few months, concerns over a potential avian influenza outbreak in the United States have increased, with avian flu outbreaks overseas resulting in the deaths of more than 60 people. Today, attendees of the Sunbelt Ag Expo learned about a propane-powered sanitizer that can help stop the spread of avian flu in poultry houses.

For years, poultry growers have used and trusted propane as the main heat source in their buildings. Now propane can be used in a different facet of production – cleaning and sanitization.

Poultry producers in Texas became all too familiar with one strain of the avian flu last year as the disease shut down several major poultry operations in the state. With an urgent need to find a way to control further spread of the disease, these producers are now looking to the poultry house sanitizer, marketed under the brand name Red Dragon™.

The Red Dragon, a new implement from Flame Engineering Inc. (LaCrosse, KS), utilizes six liquid propane torches that project intense, sweeping flames underneath a sturdy steel hood to kill bacteria. The heat from the flames stays constant at approximately 1400° F, which is hot enough to effectively eliminate a host of harmful pathogens.

"The use of propane to help in the sanitation process of poultry houses is important for both the poultry industry and the propane industry," said Mark Leitman, Director of Agriculture Programs for the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC). "Hopefully, growers will see these positive results from Texas and seek out flame sanitation in their area."

In response to the outbreak, the Texas Animal Health Commission said the poultry operations affected by the disease needed to use a form of flame sanitization before they could re-open their houses for production.

“It is our recommended practice for growers to use flame sanitation to rid poultry houses of any pinfeathers, dust or other residue capable of carrying disease,” stated Carla Everett, Director of Public Information for the Texas Animal Health Commission.

Mike and Wes Welch of Welch Gas in Linden, Texas started demonstrating the Red Dragon in April 2004 and were called on to help with the avian flu dilemma. Since the treatment, there has not been a reoccurrence of the disease. This may mean good things for both the propane and poultry industries.

“I think flame sanitization will really help the poultry industry,” said Wes Welch. “Growers are getting tired of chemical treatments that are now becoming less and less effective.”

Some growers are already using the poultry house flame sanitizer as part of their sanitation regimen and others are just beginning to experiment with the process.

Operating at one-half mile per hour, the poultry house sanitizer consumes approximately 47 gallons of propane to treat a 16,000-square-foot house. There are approximately 54,500 broiler and turkey farms in the country, each with at least one poultry house, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

According to a 2003 PERC-funded study, poultry producers annually spend $13,600 on propane, most of which goes for heating farm buildings including poultry houses. The study also revealed that more than 75 percent of poultry producers believe propane is a reliable, versatile, safe, environmentally friendly, and easily stored energy source.

“Because of the poultry industry’s confidence in propane, the propane industry is optimistic that poultry house sanitization using propane will become a widely accepted practice,” Leitman said. However, he acknowledged that the propane industry will have to coordinate their efforts to educate the poultry industry on the performance, economic, safety, and environmental benefits of propane for poultry house sanitization.

Positive Results

In addition to controlling avian flu, research on the effectiveness of the poultry house sanitizer conducted by Dr. Susan Watkins at the University of Arkansas showed that exposure to heat dramatically reduced other pathogens such as salmonella, *E. coli*, and coliform. The results of this research confirm that heat is a consistent pathogen killer, as these microorganisms cannot build up a resistance to its cell-rupturing effects.

“Nearly every grower who has used the flame sanitizer in their poultry houses has seen an improvement in their birds,” said Wes Welch.

Most notably, the growers are seeing increased livability in the third and fourth week, when they most need it, says Wes Welch. The 30-35 day livability rate is important because high mortality at that age has a direct negative effect on feed-conversion rate and the grower’s bottom line.

The poultry house sanitizer also flames off the ammonia vapors in the litter, allowing for the first three weeks of production to be virtually ammonia-free.

According to Flame Engineering, most growers see a full return on their investment in the first 12 to 18 months. One grower saw the machine increase his profits enough after the first flock to completely pay for itself. For more information on the Red Dragon, visit www.flameengineering.com or call (800) 255-2469.

PERC's vision in agriculture is that by 2010, the agricultural industry will recognize propane as a preferred energy source offering exceptional value. This value is achieved through a unique combination of product benefits, including cost-effectiveness, efficiency and productivity, reliability, portability, and environmental friendliness.

For more information on PERC and its programs to promote the safe and efficient use of propane in agriculture, call (202) 452-8975 or visit *www.agpropane.com*.

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