

# Off the Farm Help – Teaching Cage-Free Management Virtually

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**Big Dutchman.**  
Innovation Breeds Success



# Off the Farm Help – Teaching Cage-Free Management Virtually

- What's an aviary system specialist?
- Why is it important to visit farms in person?
- How restrictions affected me
- How we adapted
- When you can't have someone on the farm...
- What is a 360 video?
- How does a 360 video teach cage-free?
- Example of using a 360 video
- What else could we do?
- Conclusions
- Questions?



# What is an Aviary System Specialist?

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- Travel to cage-free facilities and assist them with bird related issues
  - Educate and help producers to be successful
- Examples:
  - You have a new cage-free pullet house
    - Visit prior to birds arrival to understand the management timeline of the pullets, where settings should be, watch lights to insure a proper dim down cycle, tips for success, etc.
    - Visit when birds are released to help modify dim-down process, if needed, pick up birds
    - Later in the flock life to prepare for moving to layer barn
  - If you have a new cage-free layer house
    - Making sure hens are laying in the nest/ troubleshoot if not
    - Help to reduce the number of floor eggs/mis-laid eggs
    - Bird movement in the cage-free system (if pullets were raised an alternate way)
    - Aggression issues
    - Overall well-being of the bird
- EDUCATE and HELP



# Why is it important to visit the farms in-person?

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- You get to see the big picture-
- Visits are usually initiated by a phone call/e-mail/text
  - From the sales team notifying of new housing
  - From the producer requesting assistance
- You get to hear about the problem, but you can't SEE the problem
- Often problems they are seeking help with are related and/or initiated by a different issue
- Find other issues
  - Fresh eyes, no time to sit and watch birds
- For new constructions...
  - Watching lights dim in-person
  - Showing producers their system
    - Where to place birds, where to have the water line, etc.



# How restrictions affected me...

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- COVID / Biosecurity
  - No visit means missing the big picture
  - New producers have no idea what their system would look like with birds or what to expect
  - Struggled to find pictures to show and give the producers the feeling of what their system would look like





# How we adapted....

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- Webinars
  - Learn/educate
- Facebook Live Videos
  - Connect with producers, give them a chance to ask questions
- 360 Videos
  - Show the inside of the barn to give new producers an idea of what their system will look like with birds, and walk them through the management timeline



# When you can't have someone on the farm...

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- Not just me – but your nutritionist, genetic company rep, veterinarian...
- Data that is helpful-
  - Feeding/lighting schedule
    - How many feeds, what times, stir or full?
    - Light intensities?
      - Get an LED light meter and actually measure your intensities (not just percentages)
        - Lighting is something I always assess when visiting a facility, and one of the biggest components that I miss being able to “SEE”
- Egg counts-
  - Floor Eggs
  - System Eggs
  - % of productions
  - Checks and Cracks
- How's your mortality?
- Are birds going up good at night? When was the last time you watched the dim down process?



- You can never have too much information!

# “I’m getting a lot of floors eggs”

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- What is a lot?
  - Numbers
- Where are the floor eggs located?
  - By partitions? By the outside walls? Throughout the aisle? Under the system?
- When are they being laid?
- How many times are you walking the flock?
- When did this number increase?
  - Keep records
- Are the birds going up good at night?
- Are you there when birds wake up?
- What is your light intensity?
- Feeding schedule?
  - Stacked feeding?
- Litter depth?





# What is a 360 Video



- Teaches new employees about the system, and how to care for the flock at different phases of the flock's life
- Provides a visual of system and flock management suggestion
- Allows for virtual consulting for system and flock management

# How does a 360 video teach cage-free management?

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- New producers receive an outline of the management and topics that they usually have the most questions on
- For example, where should the water line be when I place birds?
  - Show them birds in a house at that age, and where the water line should be
- Put the birds to bed?? What is dim-down?
  - They can watch a dim-down process
- Overall, allows them to look inside a barn at different ages of the flock and understand what their system will look like
- Better than just photos, helps capture more of the bird movement



# Example of using a 360 video: Water line placement



After birds are placed, adjust waterline height, pressure, and trip nipples.

Place chicks between waterline and feed trough.



# Example of using a 360 video: Dim down process

Once birds are released from the system it is important to physically place all birds in the system that do not go up during the dimming phase.

Putting birds in the system ensures they will have access to feed and water when the next day starts.

The incorporation of a stir feeding at the start of dim can be utilized to help draw birds up into the system.





# What else could we do?

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- Real-time camera in houses
- More recorded videos
- App
- Suggestions?



# Conclusion

- Having travel restrictions can be unfavorable for receiving the help that you need
- Optimize the potential for help by keeping records and providing information
- Virtual tools can still assist in providing some “real-time” acquaintance to a new cage-free system
- I look to continue to add more education experiences that producers can take advantage of when they can't have someone on the farm



Questions?

