

OCM Briefing Paper

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The Plucking of a Poultry Grower A Personal Story by "Bill"

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I'm a chicken farmer who wants integrators to put up a serious environmental bond on every house producing chickens to get them into the "real" game in a meaningful way, and stop overbuilding at government expense so they can control growers.

My wife and I both came from business backgrounds before we signed up for chicken houses; she had her own business, and I sold machinery systems, both in another state. We foolishly assumed that the rules we knew...such as hard work, ethical behavior, and good performance would prevail.

Actually we did prevail by being in the top few in our complex rated by cost, and having one of the largest birds; normally mutually exclusive conditions. The problem is the definition of prevailing. Prevailing as a grower in the chicken business is exactly analogous to succeeding in reaching the top deck of the Titanic as she slipped beneath the water; we are as good as the best, but that means we get to fight longer and drown last.

My scientific education and business background lulled me into believing my integrator would recognize the soundness of my observations and suggestions if I could only come up with the right explanation...present them in just one more way, one more analogy, or set of figures. The facts are, they have all the numbers, and have done all the analyses in far greater depth than I could, just chose to use the data to build walls, not ladders.

I made myself a victim of busywork, completely deluded by the expectation of honesty. The chicken companies will confiscate...yes confiscate if we use moral definition, all they can get away with. That fact is why regulation is necessary; why the P/S act was and is necessary, applied in the spirit intended.

Politicians who permit or even promote integrators' behavior can be explained in one or both of only two ways; they are ignorant, and therefore should not be in office, or they are bribed and therefore should be in jail. This is not an issue where intelligent honest men can disagree. Honest people would terminate the discussion after seeing true return on investment numbers, and adopt the new rules or some that doubled their effect.

If that isn't enough, people who want fairness, transparency, and efficiency need to know about integrators detailed flock "benchmarking" called Agri Stats. I'm not allowed to know how many birds other growers in my week get, but integrators know what their competition pays every person in every job in every company, the average mileage of every feed driver on every trip, and everything in between.

We are not disgruntled underachievers, rather disgusted overachievers, sickened by the waste of the misguided culture of small gains easily achieved by abuse, while throwing away the huge and explosive profits to be shared by a dynamic and healthy partnership with the people who put up half the money and live with the chickens daily; the growers.