

# Stagnant air, heat cause poultry loss

By Joe Lanier and Leslie Gruber

ROSE HILL — Extreme heat combined with stagnant air to bring serious losses to the southeastern North Carolina poultry industry, according to reports Thursday.

The huge poultry industry, centered on Duplin County, is second only to tobacco as an income producer in the region.

Area offices of the National Weather Service are predicting continued air stagnation with extremely high temperatures for the next two or three days.

Poultrymen here Thursday were predicting some heavy losses of birds Thursday night, saying the worst time would be from 6 to 9 p.m.

Bizzell Johnson, one of the owners of Nash Johnson & Sons, Inc., of Rose Hill, one of the largest turkey producers of the Southeast, estimated at noon the firm's producers had lost 15,000 turkeys and about the same number of chickens about noon. He said more were dropping from the heat all the time.

"What do you think, it's 102 in the shade

and there ain't a damn bit of air moving," he declared.

The atmospheric condition caught producers by surprise, although there isn't much they can do but wait it out and try to thin out bird population in some of the houses and try installing fans, according to extension workers.

Most of the losses have been among birds ready for market, Johnson said.

He said they were opening the doors to some houses and letting the turkeys out to seek shade if they want to go.

"I hope it's the right thing to do, but we've even lost some turkeys on open range," he added.

Turkey production practices have changed recently and more birds are now being fed out in houses than on open range as in the past.

Keith Hinson, general manager of Watson Seafood and Poultry Co.'s feed mills at Rose Hill, said his people had lost 5,000 to 6,000 broilers and about 1,500 hens in breeder flocks.

He said his worst loss was in the Wallace, Burgaw and Penderlea area. He said one grower, John H. Giddens of Penderlea, lost 1,700 chickens due to the heat.

Chickens tend to suffocate, according to producers. The birds are near the ground and live in dense concentration. They do not perspire. Their only way of cooling themselves is to breathe rapidly. When in mass they tend to consume all the oxygen immediately available in the still air and suffocate before the air freshens.

Some operators say chickens can adjust to the hot weather, if the air can be circulated. They'll eat less and drink more water and come out of it, they indicated.

Johnson said turkeys piled up and died in the air currents provided by fans in two houses where they were tried.

Holmes Murphy of Murphy Milling Co. of Register's Crossroads also observed turkeys will pile up and kill themselves if they feel air movement.

Joel Coleman of Carroll Milling Co. of War-

saw said he knew of 3,000 turkeys already lost due to heat. That represented about \$12,000 to \$15,000 in lost gross income, he added.

Hinson said his organization has started moving chickens at night and putting fewer birds in a crate. Normally a crate contains 12 or 13 birds. About 10 are being put in a crate under present conditions, however.

Swine producers have fared better, according to reports at markets around the area. Larger producers have sprinkling or fogging systems in their feeding areas and with plenty of moisture and shade hogs can get along fairly well, they explain.

Murphy said hog men are turning on yard sprinklers and others are simply running water to make mudholes for their pigs.

The potential seriousness of an extended atmospheric condition such as this appears in the gross-income figure listed from poultry sources for Duplin County alone in 1976 or \$75.9 million. Of that total, turkeys accounted for about \$31 million end broilers \$34 million.