

TRENDS

A Newsletter of the Mississippi Poultry Association



*Isabella Hannay, Assistant Professor, Avian Medicine
PRDL-College of Veterinary Medicine-MSU*

NEW WORLD SCREWORM: SHOULD THE POULTRY INDUSTRY BE WORRIED?

New World Screwworm (NWS) has concerned those with livestock and pets since the USDA confirmed the first United States (U.S.) case in the current outbreak on June 3, 2026. NWS is not a new parasite to the U.S. with the first recorded case occurring in 1842. However, this parasitic fly was successfully eradicated in 1966 and again after a reappearance in 2016. This meant that many of us, both the general public and animal health professionals, weren't familiar with the parasite and its potential impact when this new wave of cases was announced.

CURRENT OUTBREAK

The current outbreak started in 2023 when reported NWS cases started to rise rapidly in Panama and Costa Rica. As of August 12 2026, there have been over 209,000 cases in animals across all countries in Central America and Mexico. **We know that cases involving both captive and wild birds contribute to this total but there is no accessible data on the number and whether any of these birds were considered poultry.**

The most likely route of entry of NWS into the U.S. was the movement of infected animals across borders. This could have been livestock, pets or wildlife. NWS has been detected in bovine, ovine, caprine, canine

and feline species in the U.S. component of the outbreak. **No avian cases have been reported in the U.S. to date.**



*New World screwworm larvae
(Source: USDA)*

What is New World Screwworm (NWS)? An NWS infestation can affect any warm-blooded animal, including avian species and humans. The life cycle starts with a parasitic fly, *Cochliomyia hominivorax*, which lays eggs that subsequently develop into larvae. The infestation site, open wounds on animal flesh, can be as small as a thorn-prick. Females can also lay eggs on intact mucous membranes such as those in the mouth and around the eyes. Once on the animal, larvae consume only healthy, living flesh and not dead tissue. The burrowing nature of these larvae gives the

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2026 ■ Issue 3

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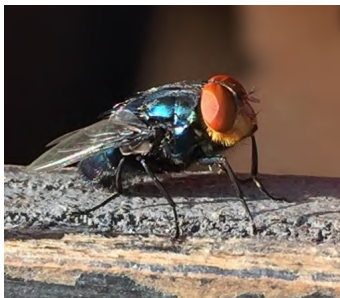
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screwworm its name and causes significant pain to the host. Eventually, the larvae reach full size and drop off into the soil where they pupate and become flies.

Avian species are not the preferred host of NWS. However, SENASICA (the Mexican equivalent to APHIS) has documented 59 cases of NWS in avian species since 2024. Additionally, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) recorded NWS infestations in Ostrich (*Struthio camelus*), Greater rhea (*Rhea americana*), Egret (*Egretta* sp.) and Roadside Hawk (*Rupornis magnirostris*) across Central America. Both the Roadside Hawk and Egret are known to inhabit the U.S. and these wild species pose a threat to poultry, especially those with outdoor access. **In terms of poultry, NWS was previously confirmed in chicken, turkeys and ducks inhabiting the U.S. in 1936.**

THE RISK TO COMMERCIAL POULTRY PREMISES

Flies are often observed when visiting poultry premises. They can be attracted to an area by fecal matter and poorly kept composting pits. It is impossible to keep poultry premises free of fecal matter. However, encouraging rapid drying of feces and effective disposal of carcasses is thought to minimize fly populations. Whilst NWS flies may be attracted to decomposing flesh and feces, this material is not part of their life cycle. Instead, they lay eggs on open flesh so it is important to minimize any activity which causes open wounds no matter how small. For example, attempt to reduce vent pecking and remove any sharp objects in the poultry house which could cause trauma.



Adult New World Screwworm fly (Source: USDA)

Many poultry producers have additional livestock and pets on their premises. This often includes beef cattle which are a common host for NWS. There is a greater likelihood that these other species will become infested with NWS which can lead to increased risk for on-site poultry. **The identification of NWS infestations could lead to movement restrictions for all livestock, including poultry, within Infested**

Zones. This is currently the case in Texas where inspections and animal movement certificates are required for movement of warm-blooded animals out of the NWS Infested Zones. This could result in delays and logistics issues for poultry being moved for placement, pullet-to-breeder, spiking and processing.

NWS can cause human infestations and there is a higher risk to those who work outside, especially in locations with warm-blooded animals. It is important that those working on livestock or poultry premises keep open wounds covered, use an EPA-registered insect repellent and remain vigilant for any symptoms of NWS. At this time, there have been no reports of cases of NWS in humans acquired in the U.S. and the risk remains low.

There are already trade implications to the current NWS outbreak with all U.S. southern ports of entry being closed to livestock trade. If NWS cases continue to increase, there could be state-to-state and international trade restrictions that could impact the poultry industry.

MOVING FORWARD

NWS was previously eradicated in the U.S. via active surveillance ef-

forts, host treatment, quarantine and the release of sterile flies. The sterility of the flies refers to their reproductive status rather than cleanliness. The theory is that male flies are sterilized without damaging their flying ability. These sterile males are released and mate with the wild population of females. This prevents successful reproduction and a subsequent decrease in the fly population size as female flies mate only once in their lifetime.

As we approach the Winter months, climate factors will be on our side. **Adult flies are not tolerant of cold weather and don't survive in air temperatures below 20 degrees Fahrenheit.** Larval survival and pupation are also negatively impacted by cold weather. This will certainly reduce spread of NWS further north.

Animal health officials are working diligently to control this outbreak through surveillance and movement restrictions where appropriate. It is important for all of us to remain vigilant and contact the Board of Animal Health if we are suspicious of New World Screwworm. The Mississippi Board of Animal Health website will contain updates as the outbreak continues. Additionally, we can **focus on adhering to strict biosecurity practices that minimize fly populations and reduce the risk of infected animals entering poultry premises.** ■



BEFORE YOU HIRE:

KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR MISSISSIPPI GROWERS

Ken Rogers, MPA Counsel, Brunini

It goes without saying that Mississippi growers know poultry. But poultry growers still face legal and regulatory obstacles at every turn, especially when bringing on new workers. To ensure protection from unwanted financial and legal liabilities as a Mississippi poultry grower, you should confirm that your hiring procedures comply with state and federal regulations.

Some key points to consider in the hiring process include topics such as the worker's classification, eligibility verification, workers' compensation coverage, wage and overtime exemptions, and employment tax withholdings. By considering each of the issues listed, you can help protect your farm from needless penalties while maintaining a reliable workforce.

DECIDING HOW TO CLASSIFY YOUR EMPLOYEE

Because different employer responsibilities may attach, the first issue to address when hiring workers is to determine whether they are likely to be classified as a 1099 Independent Contractor or W-2 Employee.

While a grower may face fewer liabilities for workers classified as 1099 Independent Contractors, sometimes the realities of the relationship between the grower/farm and the worker necessitate an employer/employee relationship.

While you may choose to call a worker an "independent contractor" or "a 1099", the actual legal determination of the relationship is not determined by the title you choose to assign. Instead, a series of employment-related laws—such as the Mississippi Employment Security Law (i.e., unemployment), the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (i.e., minimum wage and overtime) and equal employment opportunity statutes (i.e., employment discrimination)—focus on the actual economic realities of the relationship between a grower and its workers to determine whether they are employer/employee or client/independent contractor. While each law's requirements vary, they each tend to focus on the extent of control that the grower can and/or does exert over the operations of its worker. The more control, the more likely the worker is an "employee" and not a contractor.

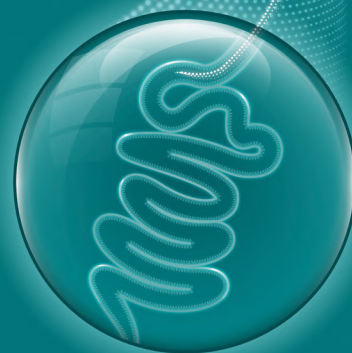
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If your aim is for the government to classify your worker as a 1099 Independent Contractor, a short form independent contractor agreement is encouraged. The agreement should address the extent of control you exercise over the worker, as well as factors, such as the nature of the business operations, who furnishes the contractor's materials and directions, the length of the agreement period and how the worker is to be paid. However, if you find yourself dealing with a W-2 Employee classification, you should evaluate each of the topics below.

ENSURING EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY

Due to increased regulatory focus on the industry, employers must ensure Form I-9/E-Verify compliance. Under federal law, employers must:

1. Ensure employees sign Section 1 of Form I-9 on or before their first day of work,
2. Complete Section 2 of Form I-9 within 3 business days of the employee's start date, and
3. Store forms for three years from the employee's start date or termination date, whichever is later, in case of government audit.

In addition, Mississippi law requires all employers, regardless of size, to verify the federal employment authorization status of all new hires through the E-Verify program. In a matter of minutes, the E-Verification system enables prospective employers to conduct a quick and free comparison of the information in an employee's Form I-9 to government records. Failing to comply with the mandate could result in the

cancellation of existing contracts, ineligibility for future contracts, or loss of licenses, permits, and certificates granted by the state of Mississippi.

By complying with Form I-9 and E-verification procedures, you can be proactive in protecting yourself from employment liabilities.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE

In Mississippi, employers with 5 or more employees must secure workers' compensation coverage. However, pursuant to Mississippi law, farmers and farm laborers may be exempt from workers' compensation coverage if they are hired solely to perform general agricultural work. The exemption is limited to ordinary farm work and does not extend to the commercial processing of agricultural products. Put simply, this exemption does not apply when an employee's work involves the commercial processing of poultry. While some growers may not be required to maintain coverage, you should consider coverage to shield yourself from lawsuits arising from workplace activities.

FLSA EXEMPTIONS

Mississippi has no law regulating minimum wage or overtime payments. Instead, Mississippi growers should defer to federal law under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The FLSA provides a minimum wage of \$7.25/hour, and in some instances, exempts grower employees from the overtime pay provisions. Under the exemption, grower employees are

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not entitled to time and one-half their regular rates of pay for work hours exceeding 40 per week. Additional exemptions and regulations may also apply and should be reviewed prior to growers employing minors less than 16 years of age and family members.

TAX WITHHOLDING BASICS

Mississippi growers should also have their employees complete a federal Form W-4 and state Form 89-350 to facilitate accurate income tax withholding calculations. Both forms should be completed on or before the employee's first day of employment.

As a poultry grower, you should be aware that the state is phasing out the state income tax. As a result, you should update employee withholding percentages every January to avoid excessive withholding.

AN OVERVIEW OF NEW HIRE REPORTING

The state of Mississippi requires reporting new hires to the Directory of New Hires within 15 days of hiring. Reporting must occur even if an employee works only one day and is terminated before an employer would otherwise file a report. New hire reporting includes the return to work of any employee who was laid off, furloughed, separated, or terminated from employment for at least 60 consecutive days.

If a grower intentionally avoids filing a new hire report, he or she may incur a civil penalty of up to \$500. If a grower unintentionally fails to

file a new hire report, the penalty will not exceed \$25. To avoid suffering penalties as an employer, you should report all new hires through online, electronic, or mail-in reporting.

CONCLUSION

By evaluating each of the hiring obstacles listed above, you can help shield your growing operation from undesirable liabilities. ■



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SAVELL JOINS MPA

Mark Leggett, President, MPA

MPA is proud to welcome Regina Savell to the staff as Operations Assistant. You may have talked to her on the phone or seen her at meetings this year. You may be talking with her about membership, or seminars or the convention.



She previously worked at Dyatech and for 29 years before that she held various positions with the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson, retiring as Reimbursement Analyst. She earned a certification as a Procedural Coder from the American Academy of Procedural Coders.

A native of Morton, she lives in Brandon with her husband James. They have 2 children; her son is married and works for Ergon and has two girls

ages 2 and 1 years old. Their daughter is married and is a PICU Nurse at UMC Sanderson Children's Hospital. ■

LAST CHANCE TO SEE "MISSISSIPPI MADE"



The Mississippi Made exhibit at the Two Mississippi Museums in Jackson will soon come to a close, with the exhibit scheduled to end November 6, 2026. ■

Featuring approximately 250 artifacts, the exhibit celebrates more than two centuries of Mississippi innovation, craftsmanship and cultural influence across agriculture, manufacturing, music, literature, science and the arts.

Mississippi's poultry industry is represented by models of a poultry house and feed bin built by the South Jones and McLaurin FFA chapters for the Mississippi Poultry Association. Thanks to the sponsorship of Wayne-Sanderson Farms, the exhibit has been free to visitors. ■

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BankPlus[®] TRAVEL GRANT

*Ken Macklin, PhD, Department Head and Professor,
Department of Poultry Science*

Two Mississippi State University Poultry Science students were awarded the \$2,500 BankPlus Travel Grant from the Mississippi Poultry Foundation for their research to find new probiotics and control of avian pathogens.

The two students, Manhong Wang and Sunita Shrestha, presented their research at the Poultry Science Association meeting in July. Manhong's research is trying to discover novel probiotics that could possibly one day be used in poultry production. Sunita's research involves trying to get a better understanding of Avian Pathogenic E. coli with the goal of being able to develop better tools for detection and control of this pathogen.

BankPlus makes an annual \$2,500 donation to the Mississippi Poultry Foundation for this travel grant and these two PhD students will be splitting this travel grant. The BankPlus Travel Grant was first awarded in 2016 to allow graduate students to present their research



Manhong Wang

at professional conferences.

"These students are working to improve bird health and make the poultry industry more productive and we are glad to assist them," said Kenny Williamson, BankPlus Senior Vice President. BankPlus, as one of the state's leading poultry lenders, is dedicated to supporting these talented students, Mississippi State University, and the Mississippi poultry industry."

Manhong Wang earned her master's degree in Animal Nutrition and Feed Science from China Agricultural University after completing her bachelor's degree in Veterinary Medicine at Hebei Agricultural University. Following graduation, she spent several years working in the poultry industry, where she was involved in evaluating nutritional and microbial strategies to improve poultry health and production performance. These experiences strengthened her interest in understanding the complex interactions between the poultry host and its gut microbiota, leading her to pursue her doctoral degree under Dr. Li Zhang in the Department of Poultry Science at Mississippi State University.

Her doctoral research focuses on applying various approaches to assess the cultivability of chicken cecal microbiota, with an emphasis on recovering beneficial bacterial species. These isolates she cultivates are tested to evaluate their potential as poultry-derived probiotic candidates. Through this integrated approach, her research aims to identify safe and effective bacterial strains for future probiotic development, ultimately expanding the range of poultry-adapted

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DATA CENTERS AND POULTRY GROWERS

This article first appeared in Southern Ag Today, July 14, 2026, 6(29.2) used by permission.

*Dennis Brothers, Associate Extension Professor
Auburn University College of Agriculture*

Of all the factors that might influence the cost of producing poultry for U.S. contract growers, data centers likely would not come to mind. Yet their impact may be broader than expected, bringing both benefits and challenges.

First, we might consider what a data center does. They are physical buildings that house large numbers of computer servers. These computers provide 3 basic roles: data storage, computer processing, and sending out digital information. Artificial intelligence (AI) systems use these massive computer systems to perform the calculations, searches, and generate answers. Because a data center is a massive number of

computer networks linked together, they require a massive amount of electricity and water to keep them running and cool.

On the positive side, modern poultry farms are increasingly connected through internet-based, integrated control systems. AI based decision systems hold the potential to further transform management decision making leading to economic gains. Internet based control systems allow growers to monitor and adjust housing conditions around the clock from virtually anywhere using smart devices. The continued expansion of data networks enhances the speed, reliability, and responsiveness of these systems. This benefits growers by helping them better maintain bird welfare and respond quickly to changing conditions, while integrators gain from improved efficiency and lower grow-out costs.

However, the downside is more complex.

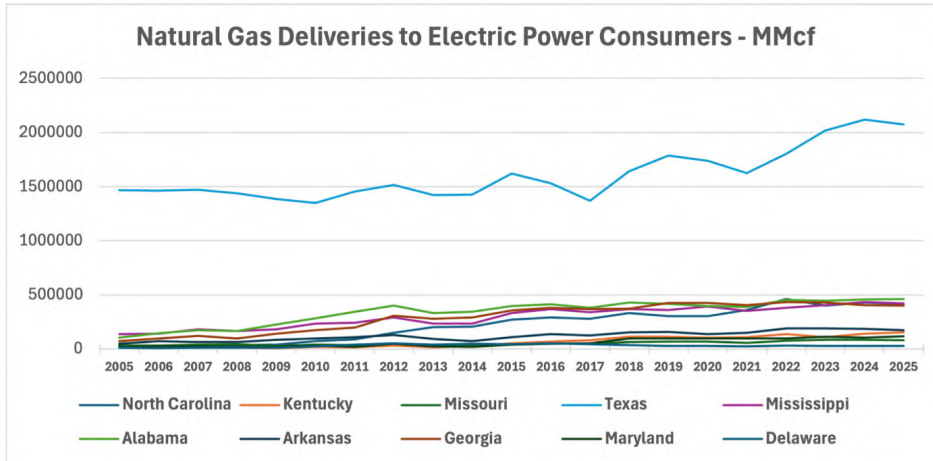


Figure 1

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Data centers are massive consumers of electricity. Estimates suggest their power demand could rise significantly by the end of the decade, potentially accounting for

a sizable share of total U.S. electricity use. Increased demand from data centers is widely expected to contribute to higher electricity costs. This matters greatly for poultry operations, which already rely heavily on electricity for ventilation, cooling, and environmental control. A typical broiler farm in the Southeast may use around 1.65 kWh per square foot annually, totaling roughly 132 megawatt-hours for a standard four-house operation.

Water use presents another important area of overlap. Both poultry farms and data centers require substantial amounts of water to manage heat. A large data center may consume over a million gallons of water per day, many times what an entire broiler farm uses in a full year. Although the scale and timing differ, both experience peak demand during hot weather. Additionally, both are often located in rural areas where supply systems may be less robust and water resources more limited. Increased competition for water can strain local utilities, drive up water costs, and potentially deplete aquifers that supply farm wells. This is particularly concerning in regions already facing tight water supplies.

The effects may extend even further into heating costs. To meet growing electricity demand, much of it driven by data centers, utility companies

are investing in new natural gas-fired power plants as a relatively fast way to expand generation capacity. In parts of the Southeast, planned additions of natural gas capacity are substantial (Figure 1). Some data center operators are even considering on-site natural gas generation to power their facilities independently.

For poultry growers, this increased demand for natural gas could lead to higher fuel prices if supply does not expand sufficiently. Since heating is a major cost, especially in broiler production, this could significantly affect profitability. The situation is further complicated by the link between natural gas and propane (LP), as a large share of U.S. propane is derived from natural gas production. Increased natural gas output could potentially boost propane supply and moderate LP prices, meaning growers using propane might see different cost impacts than those relying on natural gas.

In short, while data centers provide the internet infrastructure to improve efficiency for modern poultry production, they also intensify competition for electricity, water, and fuel. This creates a mixed and evolving cost landscape for growers.

Figure 1: Looking at the top 10 broiler producing states, increased natural gas usage by power plants is seen across the board. However, the broiler heavy states of Texas, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina are leading the way in increased NG usage for electricity production (U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2026). ■



Good Food Brings Us Together ♥

MA MA LA

Famous Chicken Nuggets

Submitted by Rep. Lance Varner,
auctioneer for the MS Poultry Foundation Scholarship Auction.

Knowing the only thing my kids ate well when young was chicken, I made my rather simple take on homemade chicken nuggets. Well, it must've hit the spot with them because they named the homemade nuggets 'Ma Ma La Nuggets.'

Ingredients

- 5 boneless skinless chicken breasts
- 3/4 cup buttermilk
- 2 egg yolks
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Garlic powder and onion powder to taste
- Slap Ya Mama seasoning
- Frying oil of choice

Prep

Cut the chicken breasts into small, bite-sized nugget pieces. In a medium bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, egg yolks, salt, and pepper to create your wet bath. In a separate shallow bowl, whisk the flour with a heavy amount of Slap Ya Mama seasoning, garlic powder, and onion powder until heavily seasoned. Submerge the chicken nuggets into the wet bath, transfer them to the seasoned flour, and toss to coat. For maximum crunch, dip the floured chicken back into the wet bath and dredge them in the flour a second time, pressing firmly to build a thick crust.

Fry & Finish

Pour 1/2 to 1 inch of frying oil into a large skillet and heat over medium-high until hot (around 350°F). Working in small batches to avoid overcrowding the pan, carefully drop the nuggets into the hot grease. Fry for 3 to 4 minutes per side, flipping once, until the crust is a deep golden-brown and the chicken is fully cooked through. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the nuggets to a paper-towel-lined plate to drain. Taste a test nugget immediately; if it needs an extra kick, shake a little more Slap Ya Mama seasoning directly over the hot crust before serving.

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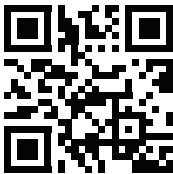
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MSU POULTRY SCIENCE

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE OF THE POULTRY INDUSTRY

*Ken Macklin, PhD, Department Head and Professor,
Department of Poultry Science*

There is a great deal happening in the Department of Poultry Science at Mississippi State University. From new facilities and expanded academic opportunities to innovative research, Extension outreach and industry partnerships, the department continues to grow while addressing the needs of one of Mississippi's most important industries.

MSU Poultry Science is one of only six poultry science degree-granting departments in the United States and has a long history of preparing students for careers throughout the poultry and allied industries. One of the most visible signs of growth is the new Poultry Feed Mill. The modular facility will expand research, teaching and hands-on training by allowing controlled research diets to be produced while giving students practical experience in feed manufacturing. The project also reflects the strong relationship between MSU and the poultry industry, with companies and allied organizations providing financial support, technical expertise and guidance.

The feed mill will complement existing facilities that include two commercial broiler houses, research housing for broilers and laying hens, hatchery resources and poultry processing capabilities. Together, these facilities allow students and faculty to work across much of the farm-to-fork poultry production system.

Preparing students for industry careers remains a major priority. The six U.S. poultry science departments collectively graduate far fewer students than the industry needs each year. MSU is working to help close this gap through recruiting, transfer agreements, and youth outreach through organizations such as 4-H and FFA. This year, MSU Poultry Science welcomed 10 new students, and there is considerable opportunity for continued growth.

Students receive much more than classroom instruction. They can participate in laboratories, research projects, internships, poultry judging, industry activities, professional meetings and hands on experiences at departmental facilities. These opportunities help prepare graduates to enter the workforce ready to address real world challenges.

Research is also expanding across the poultry production system. Faculty and students are working in nutrition and feed manufacturing, food safety, microbiology, poultry health, disease prevention, processing, breeder and broiler management, egg production, environmental management and emerging technologies. Much of this work is applied research designed to address problems facing poultry producers and companies.

Technology is becoming increasingly important as well. Artificial intelligence, sensors, automation and advanced data analysis offer new

...continued on page 19

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**International
Paper**

TRAVEL GRANT

*Ken Macklin, PhD, Department Head and Professor,
Department of Poultry Science*

This year, two Mississippi State University students will share the \$5,000 from the 2026 International Paper Research Scholarship awarded by the Mississippi Poultry Foundation.

The Mississippi Poultry Association Board of Directors reviews anonymous research projects and this year selected promising research by two PhD students in the Department of Poultry Science. The board selects those that show promise in overcoming issues the industry is facing.

One of the selected projects led by Randy Domer could help the poultry industry understand the role of complexed trace minerals on laying hen nutrition. The other student, Leticia Orellana, researched the role that time of egg lay and eggshell translucency have on eggshell and chick quality.

"This year's recipients of the grant are great examples of why International Paper created this award in 2014 to recognize sharp young researchers who are working on solutions that benefit our poultry industry customers," said Clay Adkins, International Paper National Protein Director.

Randy Domer, a native of Linden, Guyana, began his career as a veterinary technician before advancing into veterinary medicine. His path shifted toward animal nutrition after attending the Arkansas Nutrition Conference in 2021, an experience that reshaped his perspective on the role nutrition plays in animal health and production. This new direction led him to pursue a master's degree in Poultry Science at Auburn University.



Randy Domer, Linden, Guyana

He is now a Ph.D. student in Poultry Science with a focus on layer nutrition at Mississippi State University under the guidance of Dr. Pratima Adhikari and is expected to graduate in May 2028. His research examines how excess dietary mineral inclusion in laying hen diets can be safely reduced using amino acid complexed trace minerals and enzyme supplementation. His work spans both the pullet and laying phases, evaluating reduced macro- and trace-mineral levels alongside phytase supplementation on performance, bone mineral density and strength, and mineral digestibility, with

the broader goal of lowering feed costs and mineral excretion without compromising bird health or production.

Leticia Orellana grew up on a small farm in Guatemala, where her father instilled in her a deep respect for the land and animals, values that sparked her lifelong passion for agriculture. Her dedication and academic excellence earned her a scholarship to study agriculture in Honduras.



Leticia Orellana, Guatemala

After completing her undergraduate degree, Leticia did an internship in a poultry science laboratory at Auburn University, where she discovered a strong interest in the field. This experience led her to pursue and complete a master's degree in poultry science, alongside internships with leading companies such as Tyson Foods and Cargill. Now, as a Ph.D. student under the guidance of Dr. Ken Macklin at Mississippi State University, she finds deep fulfillment in her research in Poultry reproduction and physiology.

At the PSA 2026 conference, Leticia presented her research titled "Interactive Effects of Flock Age, Oviposition, and Eggshell Translucency on Egg Quality and Hatchability." Her study investigated eggshell translucency, a growing concern in the industry due to its association with reduced hatchability. Her findings underscore the importance of evaluating eggshell translucency in the context of other physiological factors rather than as an isolated parameter.

The study suggests that producers should consider oviposition time when screening eggs for translucency, as the incidence and impact of translucency vary throughout the day. Furthermore, the research demonstrated that variations in egg quality associated with these factors are more pronounced in younger flocks, while the negative effect of eggshell translucency on hatchability remains consistent across flock ages.

Looking ahead, Leticia aspires to become a university professor, where she can continue conducting impactful research while mentoring the next generation of agricultural professionals. ■

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opportunities in poultry house management, feed manufacturing, animal health, processing and food safety. At the same time, students continue to build strong foundations in poultry biology, nutrition, management, health, processing and food safety, along with leadership and problem solving skills.

The department's mission extends well beyond Starkville. Through Mississippi State University Extension, faculty and staff work with poultry growers, industry personnel, youth, educators and communities throughout Mississippi. This connection between research, Extension and industry helps ensure that university research addresses practical needs and that new information reaches the people who can put it into practice.

Collaboration remains central to nearly everything happening in the department. Partnerships with poultry companies, allied industries, commodity organizations, veterinarians, government agencies and other universities support research, student internships, employment opportunities, outreach programs and facility development.

Perhaps the best word to describe MSU Poultry Science today is momentum. New facilities are being developed, new faculty have been hired, academic pathways are expanding, research programs are growing and students are receiving more hands on opportunities.

With poultry being Mississippi's leading agricultural commodity, the department has an important role in supporting the industry's future. Its mission is clear: educate students, conduct research that matters, serve the poultry industry and prepare for what comes next. ■

MPA SAYS FAREWELL TO AL BERGIN

Mark Leggett, President, MPA

MPA lost a long-time member, Merck employee and a former Salesman of the Year with the death of Michael Albert (Al) Bergin on August 18, 2026.

Al was employed by Schering-Plough which Merck acquired. He was chosen as the 2000 MPA Salesman of the Year, the honor now known as Allied Industry Leader of the Year.

Born May 4, 1955, a devoted husband, father, grandfather, and faithful servant of God. A man of deep and unwavering Catholic faith. He believed that your faith was revealed in the way you lived your life—in the way you loved others, cared for your family, served those around you, and showed kindness when no one was watching. His faith was not merely something he spoke about; it was the foundation upon which he lived, according to his obituary is greatest legacy will not be measured by what he owned or what he accomplished, but by the lives he touched and the faith and love he passed on to his family.

...continued on page 25



INVESTING IN POULTRY GROWTH *Together*



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MISSISSIPPI POULTRY FOUNDATION ENDOWMENT SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

Tannah Christensen, MSU Extension Instructor

The recipients of this year's Mississippi Poultry Foundation Endowment Scholarship each discovered poultry through different paths. One grew up surrounded by the industry, another found her place through research and veterinary science, and the third discovered his passion through FFA. Together, Kendall Parks, Ashton Ramirez, and David Burch represent the talent, dedication, and diverse experiences shaping the future of poultry.

David Burch of Indian Island, SC, will begin his journey in the Department of Poultry Science here at Mississippi State this fall as an incoming freshman. His interest in poultry science began in high school through his FFA program after he was encouraged to attend an event.

"I immediately fell in love with the environment and

the people," Burch said. "I joined as soon as I could and started going to as many FFA events as I could."

He soon became captivated by poultry-related subjects and decided to pursue a career in the industry. With a father who has been a lifelong MSU fan and MSU offering one of the nation's leading poultry programs, Burch said applying to the university was a "no-brainer."



David Burch, Indian Island, SC

He plans to earn a degree in Applied Poultry Management and use the knowledge and experience he gains to build a successful career in poultry. As an out-of-state student, receiving the scholarship helped make that opportunity possible.

"Receiving this scholarship helped me attend MSU and achieve my goals of getting a degree and
...continued on page 23

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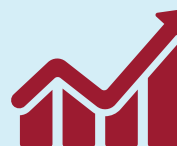


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CANDIDATES FOR CONTESTED MISSISSIPPI CHANCERY COURT JUDGE ELECTIONS

Numbers in **bold** are open seats
(i) Is an incumbent

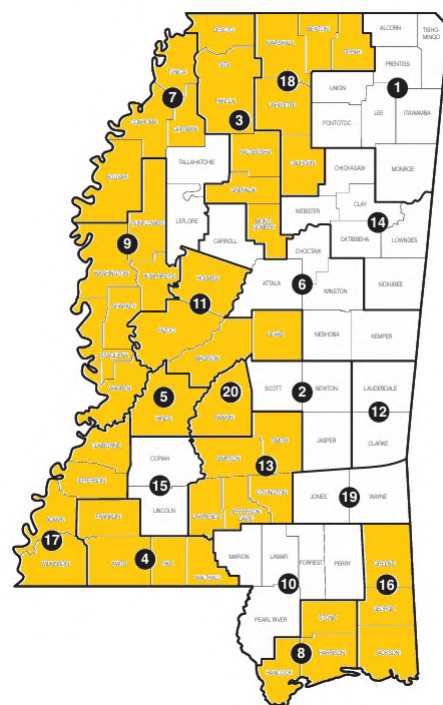
Name District-Place

Ginger M. Miller	3-1
Jay Westfaul	3-1
Debbra K. Halford (i)	4-3
Ashunda Hampton	4-3
Bridgett B. Clayton	5-3
Tametrice E. Hodges	5-3
W. M. Sanders	7-2
Willie J. Perkins Sr. (i)	7-2
Haley Necaise Broom	8-4
Stephen J. Maggio	8-4
Frances "Fran" Yeatts	8-4
Penny B. Lawson	9-2
Vicki Roach Barnes (i)	9-2
Cynthia Lee Brewer (i)	11-2
Rhonda Cecilia Cooper	11-2
Gene D. Berry	11-3
David Bridges	11-3

Name District-Place

Alan Rhea	11-3
George Schmidt	13-2
John D. Smallwood (i)	13-2
Zachary M. Vaughn	13-2
D. Neil Harris Sr.(i)	16-1
Jennifer Sekul Harris	16-1
Matthew Paul Pavlov	16-1
Elizabeth Owens (i)	17-2
William "Ty" Scott	17-2
Gwendolyn Baptist	17-1-3
Malenda H. Meacham	17-1-3
Jenessa Carter Hicks	18-1
Sarah J. Liddy	18-1
Jennifer Shackelford	18-1
Michael Noel Watts	18-1
Bo Agnew	20-1
Keri H. Carroll	20-1
John Heath Powell	20-1
Michael J. Wolf	20-1

CHANCERY COURT DISTRICT MAP



CANDIDATES FOR CONTESTED MISSISSIPPI CIRCUIT COURT JUDGE ELECTIONS

Numbers in **bold** are open seats
(i) Is an incumbent

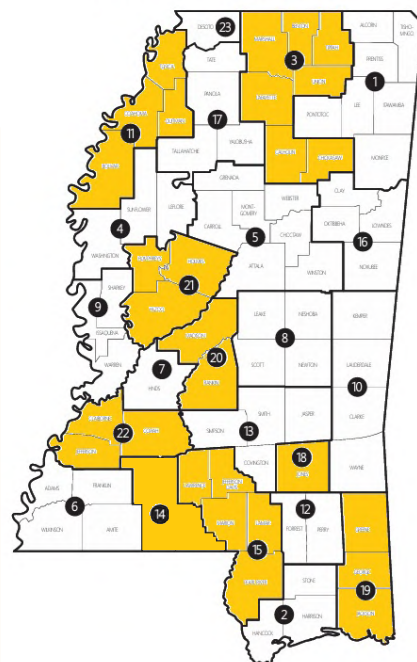
Name District-Place

Bart M. Adams	3-2
Shirley C. Byers	3-2
Steven Patrick Jubera	3-2
Stephanie "Nikki" Morris-Harris	11-2
David L. Tisdell	11-2
Brendon Adams	14-2
Matt Kitchens	14-2
Albert Turnage	14-2
Ryan Bruhl	15-2
Prentiss G. Harrell (i)	15-2
Brad R. Thompson	18-1
Eric TieBauer	18-1

Name District-Place

Matthew Lachaussee	19-1
Justin Lovorn	19-1
Kathy King Jackson (i)	19-2
Leilani "Lani" Tynes	19-2
Sarah Moulder Butler	20-1
Scott Gilbert	20-1
Carter Smith	20-1
Gordon Shaw, Jr.	21-1
Joseph "Jody" Neyman	21-1
Lucius Edwards	21-1-4
John Hughes	21-1-4
Tim Howard	22
Akillie Malone Oliver	22

CIRCUIT COURT DISTRICT MAP



...continued from page 20

career in Poultry Science,” Burch said.

Kendall Parks, a senior from Cumming, Georgia, considers poultry a family tradition. Her grandfather and father both worked in the industry, inspiring her to follow in their footsteps.



Kendall Parks, Memphis, Cummings, GA
for her.

“I wanted to become the next generation of my family in the poultry industry,” Parks said. “I have always loved working with poultry and love agriculture in general.”

Mississippi State University was not originally part of a carefully mapped-out plan. Parks toured the university “on a whim,” but quickly realized she had found the right place

Parks said, “I fell in love with it. After that, I knew it was the place for me and haven’t looked back.”

During the past two years, she has worked with Dr. Kelley Wamsley as an undergraduate research assistant. In that role, she has assisted graduate student research trials examining factors that affect poultry nutrition. She has also gained industry experience through summer internships with Mar-Jac Poultry in Gainesville, GA, and Amick Farms in Batesburg, SC.

After earning her bachelor’s degree, she plans to pursue a master’s degree specializing in broiler nutrition. She hopes to then earn a doctorate or begin a career focused on poultry nutrition and feed.

For Ashton Ramirez, a senior from Memphis, TN, interest in poultry grew from a lifelong love of animals and a goal of becoming a veterinarian. Although she did not grow up on a farm or in an agricultural setting, raising backyard chickens gave her an early opportunity to learn about poultry.

A first-generation Latina college student, Ramirez is double majoring in poultry science and animal and dairy sciences with a concentration in Pre-Vet Science. She chose Mississippi State for its many opportunities to study livestock, poultry, and animal agriculture while remaining close to home.

Ramirez initially added Poultry Science to better understand poultry alongside other animal species. Through her classes and research, however, she developed a greater appreciation for the poultry industry and its role in animal health, food production, and agriculture.



Ashton Ramirez, Memphis, TN

...continued on page 25



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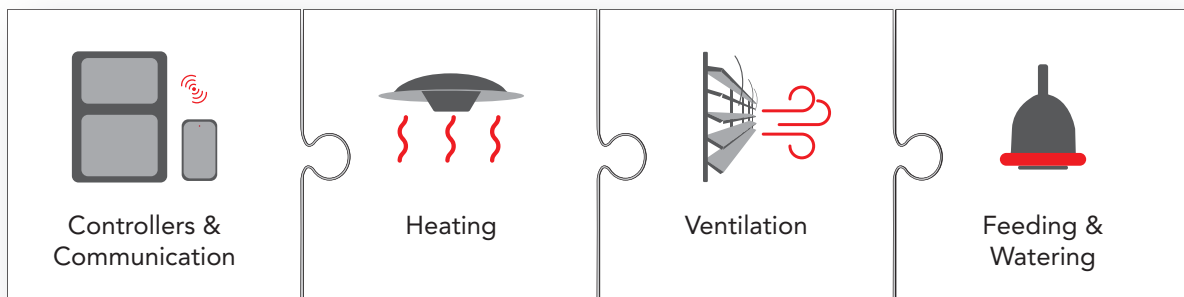
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Endowment continued from page 23...

She has conducted research on *Enterococcus cecorum* and presented her work at the International Poultry Science Forum. Ramirez plans to continue participating in poultry research as she prepares for veterinary school and a career in mixed-animal medicine.

"I hope to work with livestock and production animals while also having the opportunity to care for small and exotic animals," Ramirez said. "Ultimately, I want my career to allow me to continue learning while serving animals and the agricultural communities that depend on them."

She also hopes her journey encourages students from similar backgrounds to pursue opportunities in higher education, agriculture, science, and veterinary medicine.

Although their stories are different, Parks, Ramirez, and Burch share a commitment to learning, serving agriculture, and contributing to the future of the poultry industry. The Mississippi Poultry Foundation Endowment Scholarship is helping each student take the next step toward those goals.

"I am grateful to the Mississippi Poultry Association for this scholarship," Ramirez said. "The support means a great deal to me as I finish my undergraduate degree and prepare for veterinary school."

Through investments in students like these, Mississippi's poultry community is not only supporting their education; it is helping prepare the future of the poultry industry. ■

Travel Grant continued from page 11...

probiotics available to improve gut health and reduce reliance on antibiotics in poultry production.

Her award-winning research focused on evaluating the safety of four *Enterococcus faecalis* isolates recovered through our culturomics study using a chicken embryo challenge model. The study demonstrated that three isolates were non-pathogenic and suitable for continued evaluation as potential poultry probiotics, while one isolate was excluded due to increased virulence. These findings emphasize the importance of early safety screening in identifying poultry-derived probiotic candidates and provide a foundation for developing safe and effective probiotics for the poultry industry.

Following graduation, Manhong plans to continue her research in academia, with a focus on poultry gut microbiota and probiotic development. ■

Al Bergin continued from page 19...

He is survived by his wife, Leasa Skinner Bergin; his four children, Joe Bergin (Kristen), Kate Bergin VanEtten (Chris), John Bergin (Leah), and Marty Ann Lindsey (Brian); eleven grandchildren; four brothers, Chuck Bergin, Marty Bergin, Burny Bergin and Bob Bergin; and one sister, Mary Beth Dye and many extended family members and friends who loved him dearly.

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BREEDER HATCHERY IS WELL ATTENDED BY MEMBERS

Mark Leggett, *President, Mississippi Poultry Association*

MPA members returned to Copiah-Lincoln Community College for the 2026 Breeder-Hatchery Seminar that focused, among other things keeping farms and hatcheries cleaner to prevent diseases.

Jonathan Moon, Miss. State University extension instructor, moderated the day-long event.

Daren Rakestraw with Aviagen kicked off the seminar talking about Male Management and Fertility. He said the hatch rate in the industry began falling in 2018 and “we haven’t turned the corner yet.” Rakestraw said the pressure on the breeder side of the business is real and that spike males have never been more important. With new males coming into a breeder house, there will be an increase in aggressive behavior for a couple of weeks.

Dr. Mueez Ahmad with Arm & Hammer spoke about the im-



portance of Hatchery Sanitation. He said a hatchery has a microbiome that grow different bacteria and fungi on different surfaces and that respond to different cleaners, disinfectants, and methods of application. Only U.S. Environmental Protection Agency-approved disinfectants should be used. He presented a color-coded chart of different chemicals and why type of bacteria or fungi they work on.

Heath Whiddon with Lubing Systems, explained that with the average of an egg producer at more than 52 years old and finding labor major concerns, some growers are turning to more modern egg collection systems rather than hand-packing.



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Jeanna Wilson, retired University of Georgia professor stressed the linkage between the breeder farm and the hatchery. She said, “if the house is not clean and the flock is not healthy, it is difficult to succeed.” She said there is no value in setting floor eggs because dirty eggs can comminate hundreds of others, noting that “the hatchery is only as clean as the dirtiest egg.” The egg collection room should be clean enough that a grower would feel comfortable “eating (lunch) in there.”

David Engel, with Cobb-Vantress, addressed feed distribution and pullet flock uniformity. Growers can’t guarantee equal feed intake, but they can ensure equal opportunity by ensuring birds occupy the feeders evenly down the feeder line and that there is minimal competition. Consistent feeding times and watching the birds ensure uniformity.

Josie Gamble with Merck Animal Health, spoke about Egg Turning. She said that it is important to chick quality because embryos can adhere to the surface of the eggshell leading to chick defects. Hatchability decreases with lower turning angles; the ideal angle is 38-45 degrees.

Dr. Jason Sousa, Amick Farms veterinarian, reviewed ways to identify diseases but he urged growers to always consult with their company veterinarian. He reviewed coccidiosis, blackhead, enterococcus, peritonitis, fowl cholera, which can show symptoms like avian influenza and infectious bronchitis virus. He stressed mortality disposal, keeping wild birds, rodents, insects, and unnecessary traffic out of the houses are key.

Dr. Randi Cran, Wayne-Sanderson Farms veterinarian, wrapped up the day speaking about biosecurity. She said after starting her cur-

rent job she had to deal with the first HPAI case in 2022 and an ILT outbreak in 2023.

The first line of defense in keeping diseases out is the perimeter buffer area that includes all structures and the high traffic areas. The biggest hurdle, according to Dr. Cran, is the amount of necessary traffic onto the farm.

Next is the line of separation from outside to inside each house. There should be footbaths at every entrance. Growers should communicate expectations with visitors including PPE. Battling pests is a constant fight because, she said, pests such as rodents, buzzards and swallows come back.

MPA would like to thank everyone who attended and all of our members who sponsored the lunch and gift cards. Your support and participation helped make this a great event. ■



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VOTERS TO FILL MISSISSIPPI

HOUSE VACANCIES NOVEMBER 3RD

Mark Leggett, President, Mississippi Poultry Association

Voters in two House districts will go to the polls November 3 to fill seats left by the deaths of two representatives earlier this year, Price Wallace in House District 77 and Bo Brown of HD70.

Wallace, a Koch grower and member of MPA, was chairman of the Constitution Committee. He was first elected in 2018 replacing former Rep. Andy Gipson when Gipson was named Agriculture and Commerce Commissioner.

Brown, first elected in 2019 served on the Jackson City Council from 1997-2005.

THE FOUR CANDIDATES LISTED FOR HD 77 ARE:

- Christopher Dunn, CFO of Vestra Revenue Cycle Management & restaurant owner
- Dianne McNair-Gaddis, founder and CEO of 3 Girls Trucking
- Melissa Sullivan, Mendenhall, founder of The Center for Pregnancy Choice of Simpson County
- Craig Williams.

IN HD 70, THE THREE CANDIDATES RUNNING ARE:

- Imelda Brown, wife of Bo Brown, former Jackson Public Schools employee
- Marcus Cheatham, Jackson businessman, ran for twice for city

- council, retired U.S. Army colonel
- James Lott III, Clinton Alderman.

Biographical information on candidates came from the Clarion-Ledger. House District 77 precincts include:

Rankin County: Antioch-Mayton, Cato, Dry Creek (part), East Steens Creek (part), and Puckett;

Simpson County: Braxton, DLo, Dry Creek, Harrisville, Jupiter, Jupiter A, Magee 1 (part), Magee 2 (part), Magee 4-N, Magee 4N A, Magee 4-S 2,, Mendenhall 1, Mendenhall 3, Merit 1,, Oak Grove B, Pearl (part), Pinola, Shivers A, Sumrall, and Weathersby. ■



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Tannah Christensen, MSU Extension Instructor

A SUMMER TO REMEMBER FOR MISSISSIPPI POULTRY YOUTH PROGRAMS

It has been a wild, fun, and exciting summer for Mississippi Poultry Youth Programming! From judging contests and cooking competitions to hands-on workshops and behind-the-scenes tours, youth across the state explored the poultry industry while building skills, confidence, and lifelong memories.



Our summer began with poultry programming at three of Mississippi's four regional 4-H Project Achievement Days, which host competitions and educational workshops for junior 4-H members. Through junior poultry judging contests and omelet workshops, youth strengthened their decision-making skills, learned more about egg preparation and food safety, and discovered new ways to become involved in poultry projects.

Poultry education also traveled to Lincoln Ag Camp and Pine Belt Ag Camp, where campers participated in interactive activities that introduced them to poultry science and agriculture. We also hosted a poultry stop during MSU STEAM Day, giving junior 4-H'ers an opportunity to connect poultry with science, technology, engineering, agriculture, and mathematics.

Competition season brought even more excitement with the North and South 4-H BBQ Contests. This year, we also implemented preliminary North and South Omelet Cook-off Contests. The top six teams from each preliminary contest earned the opportunity to advance to the 4-H Day at the Mississippi State Fair Omelet Cook-off Contest in October. The State 4-H BBQ Cook-off Contest solidified our national contenders. Congratulations to Lincoln County 4-H members John Henry King, the state turkey barbecue champion, and Preston Morse, the state chicken barbecue champion! They will represent Mississippi and compete against some of the best young poultry grill masters in the country at the National 4-H Poultry and Egg Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, in November.

We finished the summer with Poultry Discovery Day, hosted by the Mississippi State University Department of Poultry Science for youth ages 5-13. Poultry Science faculty and students came together to provide an unforgettable day filled with hands-on learning. Participants

explored poultry science through a layer hen necropsy, embryo breakouts, chicken sausage making, a poultry nutrition lesson, fun activities, and tours of MSU poultry facilities. It was a wonderful opportunity for young people and their families to see the many different areas of poultry science and the teamwork that supports Mississippi's poultry industry. We are thankful to Aviagen for sponsoring our lunch for this event.

Although summer has come to an end, our poultry programming is far from slowing down. This fall, youth will showcase their poultry chain projects they have worked on throughout the year at the Poultry Chain Project Junior Show on October 14th. The State Fair Omelet Cook-off Contest and Egg Decorating Contest will follow on October 17th. If you are at the fair either of these days, we'd be happy to have you. Our national competitors will then travel to Louisville for the National 4-H Poultry and Egg Conference on November 18th and 19th. We also plan to close out the year with another Poultry Discovery Day designed for our junior high and high school youth.

We are incredibly thankful for the continued support of the Mississippi Poultry Association, the financial support of the Mississippi Poultry Foundation, our poultry companies, faculty, staff, students, Extension personnel, volunteers, families, and community partners. Your investment allows us to provide opportunities that help young people learn, compete, lead, and discover their place in Mississippi's poultry industry. ■



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UPCOMING EVENTS:

- OCT 1 Best Chicken Dish Contest Begins
- NOV 2 Top 10 Chicken Dish Restaurants Announced
- DEC 1 Top 3 Chicken Dish Restaurants Announced
- FEB 18 Poultry Health Seminar



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