Moisture and Ammonia Removal from Chicken Houses: An Innovative, Affordable Cool Season Ventilation Solution

Stop losing profits. Learn the science behind distributing conditioned air without drafts and benefit from drier litter and increased ammonia removal.

*Philip Risser*

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Achieving the Optimal Cool Season Environment

Cool season ventilation systems have failed to consistently destratify air, causing drafts, and, ultimately lost profits.
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Author
Philip Risser, Vice President - Engineering, Valco Companies, Inc.

Abstract
This document provides an overview of the need for innovative cool season ventilation in chicken houses. Topics covered include achieving peak production through moisture and ammonia removal.

A Bird’s Eye Overview
According to the USDA, 42.8 million pounds of broilers and turkeys and 6,735 million dozens of eggs are forecasted to be produced in the United States in 2013. The poultry industry in the United States is the largest producer in the world, and the second-largest exporter of poultry meat, and a significant egg producer.¹

These sizeable poultry projections make it more crucial than ever for growers and producers to develop and maintain optimal environments for exceptional poultry growth and production. To be profitable, farmers must use the best practices and technological advances in order to achieve the most advantageous overall environment.

Body size, carcass composition yields and meat quality in domestic fowl have dramatically increased through the successful application of modern poultry genetics. For example, at six weeks of age, a broiler chicken today weighs six times more than a breed genetically unaltered since 1957, with nine percent more breast meat.²
Today’s larger broilers have much larger breasts, and as a result, have become more reactive to temperature changes, dampness, ammonia and dust. There is a direct correlation between environmental conditions (like temperature, moisture levels, drafts and air quality) and poultry growth and performance. Growers who cannot effectively control all of these factors have broiler birds with reduced health, lower live weight, less efficient feed conversion, poorer carcass quality and carcass yield.

**Minimum Ventilation Key in Cool Season**

Cool weather ventilation demands different strategies and systems than during summer (hot weather) ventilation. Ventilation in the summer cools the poultry house. But, in the cool months, “Minimum Ventilation” helps manage the environment for moisture and ammonia removal. Minimum ventilation works in concert with proper insulation, inlets and fan timing to keep the environment in the chicken house as constant and evenly conditioned as possible.

For every pound of feed a chicken consumes, it will consume nearly two pounds of water. In a broiler house with 25,000 birds, 25,000 gallons of water will have been consumed by Day 28! Because of genetics and faster growth rates, this number increases yearly – just ten years ago, 25,000 birds would have consumed only 20,000 gallons by Day 28. Minimum ventilation has a bigger job to do than ever, and current ventilation systems are often not effective in the cool seasons.

Of the water consumed, approximately 75 percent ends up in the litter or in the air. It is the ventilation system’s job to remove this moisture efficiently in order to prevent ammonia problems, foot problems, leg issues and condensation. Unfortunately, it is not enough to simply turn on a fan or put it on a timer. It is critical that fresh air be “conditioned” before being
introduced to the birds and distributed evenly to prevent temperature stratification and dead spots.

Current Minimum Ventilation Solutions – Opportunity for Improvement

How are current Minimum Ventilation systems designed? One of the most common systems uses exhaust fans run on timers that vary the cycle time based on bird age (for broilers or pullets) and bird numbers (broilers, layers, pullets, breeders, etc.). Sidewall or ceiling inlets are opened when the fans run to allow fresh outside air to be metered into the building. Fans are generally run at a high static pressure during Minimum Ventilation to create a high air speed at the inlet. This high air speed is necessary to promote mixing of the cooler outside air with the warmer inside air before being introduced to the birds (conditioning). Without the high static pressure, the heavier cold air from sidewall inlets would simply fall to the floor, onto the birds without first mixing with warmer air in the house. This cold air draft results in a poor bird environment, and ultimately, lost profits.

Problems with the current minimum ventilation solutions include:

- Air speeds decrease very quickly beyond the inlet and in today's wider houses, fresh air may not make it to the center of the house before it slows and falls to the floor.
Because fans must run at a high static pressure, they are running less efficiently and consuming more electricity per CFM of air exhausted

Supplemental heat, when needed, is added at discreet locations so there is a strong tendency to develop warmer areas and colder areas within the house

Temperature stratification occurs naturally because warm air is lighter and rises to the ceiling – it is not uncommon for the temperature to change 1 to 3 degrees per foot!

Because the fans cycle on and off, the fresh air from inlets also cycles on and off. This means that air distribution and mixing is not happening constantly – instead, there can be long periods of time with no air movement

Limited air movement means that wet litter may occur, leading to high ammonia levels and reduced growth efficiency

As a result of poor mixing of cool outside air with inside air, condensation can form on walls, fans, curtains and other surfaces, posing further risks and deterioration to structures and equipment.

How Would an Ideal Cool Season Ventilation System Perform?

The ideal cool season ventilation system would introduce fresh air into the house, and remove moisture and ammonia.

**The ideal cool season ventilation system would accomplish the following:**

- Condition cool, fresh outside air by mixing it completely with warm inside air before being introduced to the birds.
- Evenly and gently distribute the conditioned air throughout the house without drafts that harm bird development and health.
- Evenly distribute conditioned air effectively in today’s wide houses.
- Eliminate cold areas and warm areas during cool seasons.
- Distribute supplemental heat evenly throughout the entire house.
- Gently vertically mix the house air to eliminate nearly all temperature stratification.
- Conserve electricity and lower operating costs by enabling exhaust fans to run more efficiently at a lower static pressure.
  - Ensure consistent and gentle air movement at all times, rather than a cycle of rapid air movement followed by periods of dead air.
- Provide a consistent and comfortable environment for the birds through consistent air movement
- Keep litter dry, reducing ammonia levels, through consistent air movement to improve paw quality
- Minimize the opportunity for condensation to occur through consistent air mixing and movement

**Engineering the Ideal Cool Season Ventilation System Design**

A new system for cool season ventilation has been designed by VAL-CO® using a centrifugal fan with an optional metered ceiling inlet. The system, known as the VAL-CO® Hemisphere Mixing Fan, features a large diameter (48” or 72”) rotor with radial paddles housed in a steel frame and mounted to the ceiling of poultry houses.

Like all centrifugal fans, the VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fan draws air from the
center of the rotor and propels it outwards. This action draws air from below to provide vertical mixing and distributes the air throughout the house. When combined with the optional metered ceiling inlet, the fresh, cool outside air is simultaneously drawn from above and mixed with the warm air near the ceiling before being introduced to the birds.

**Prevent drafts: slowly circulate air in every direction**

Because the VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fan is a large diameter centrifugal fan, it moves a large volume of air at a slow speed. This prevents drafts while mixing air in all directions. Cold and warm areas are eliminated – Users report less than two degrees of temperature difference top-to-bottom, end-to-end throughout the entire house!

The gentle air movement created by the VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fan extends up to 75 feet in all directions. Recommended spacing is 75 – 125 feet in a single row down the middle of the house.

![Diagram of VAL-CO® Hemisphere Mixing Fan](image)

**Figure 3 - VAL-CO® Prototype Fan Model**

When used with the optional metered ceiling intake, there is no need for exhaust fans to run at high static pressure, as the VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fan is consistently mixing house air without the need for high velocities at the inlets. Lower static pressure means higher efficiency of operation.

When exhaust fans shut off, the VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fan continues to run, providing consistent and gentle air movement. This results in a consistent and comfortable environment for the birds, drier litter, lower ammonia, and less condensation.
A Well-Ventilated Cool Season Conclusion

Today’s poultry farmers must adapt to the ever-increasing demands on quality, production, genetic improvements, and fuel expenses in order to make a profit. Farmers must continually seek advances in technology and techniques to improve their animal housing systems in order to remain competitive and be successful.

The innovative design of the VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fan for cold season ventilation is a smart product that helps farmers to control their chicken house environments for maximum stability and bird comfort. The VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fan dramatically reduces temperature variations and improves bird comfort which ultimately leads to higher profits. Users are seeing two degrees or less in temperature variations throughout pullet and layer houses.

A Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, farmer selected VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fans in order to keep the temperature in his barn more even by destratifying the air during the cold months. His primary goal was to dry his litter more thoroughly in the cool season, so that he could collect drier manure and significantly reduce ammonia levels. He reported being surprised at the uniform air temperature in his chicken house, how even the litter dried and noticed the temperature change throughout the barn on cold mornings was far less after installing VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fans.
The VAL-CO® Hemisphere Fan offers patent pending technology and:

- The ideal cold weather solution for layer, broiler, and pullet houses
- User-reported peak production of 98% in layer houses
- A large diameter rotor and slower rotation for quiet operation
- High volume air movement with no draft on the birds
- No dead spots throughout the entire house
- Even heat distribution to reduce fuel bills
- Air thrown up to 60 feet – ideal for wider houses
- Optional air inlet to introduce air from attic or outside
- Warmest air in the house mixed with fresh outside air before it contacts the birds
- An actuated baffle that control the introduction of fresh air
- Dries manure to promote paw quality
- Eliminates drafts and cold zones during minimum ventilation
- Eliminates the need for sidewall inlets during minimum ventilation
- Robust design and construction that ensures years of trouble-free operation
- Precision-machined hub to keep rotor true
- A rigid frame for maintaining structural integrity
- Heavy duty ball bearing shaft supports
- Optional air inlet to introduce air from attic or outside
- Optional variable speed operation allowing for precision air circulation control
- Availability in 48” and 72” models
- Recommended spacing of 75 to 125 feet

Poultry growers now have the ability to take real control of their cool season ventilation. The VAL-CO® Hemisphere Mixing Fan provides the superior cool season ventilation solution for layer, broiler, and pullet houses. It destratifies the air in poultry housing environments throughout cool seasons resulting in less moisture, lower condensation, drier litter, reduced ammonia, lower fuel costs and healthier, high producing birds.

The VAL-CO® Hemisphere Mixing Fan will be available in 2013.
About the Author

Raised on a Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, dairy farm, the author’s inherent knack for developing innovative farming solutions led him to pursue his bachelor’s degree in agricultural engineering from Penn State University and earn his master’s degree in agricultural engineering from the University of Wisconsin. Philip Risser has served Valco Companies, Inc., as vice president of engineering since 2009. As such, he has directed the development of the Horizon® Environmental Controller that provides users with unparalleled ease of use, control, and data gathering capabilities. Other innovations that Mr. Risser has participated in engineered include the FUZE® ProLine® feeder and the Flat Top Community Nest. He previously served as design engineer with International Harvester, design engineer and engineering manager for Aerial Innovations, engineering manager for Spanco and product line manager and engineer for Herr Industrial. Mr. Risser holds five patents, with two patents pending.

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References

3 Comparative growth performance of Ross 308 male broilers (2001 strain) and Athens-Canadian random bred control male broilers (1957 strain) offered chronologically appropriate diets (Havenstein et al., 2003). The environmental impact of low feed conversion ratios in poultry, 07/17/2012
Contact Valco Companies, Inc.

Product Information:

Philip Risser – Vice President Engineering
Office: 717-354-4586 x437
Mobile: 717-598-9460
prisser@val-co.com

Michael Kohls – Product Manager
Office: 717-354-4586 x438
Mobile: 717-598-9362
mkohls@val-co.com

Sales Inquiries:

Robert Zeller – Vice President Sales
Office: 717-354-4586 x433
Mobile: 717-598-9458
rzeller@val-co.com

Press Inquiries:

Michael Schmid – Vice President Business Development & Marketing
Office: 717.354.4586, x476
Mobile: 717.324.6296
mschmid@val-co.com


Connect with VAL-CO® on Facebook Twitter LinkedIn YouTube.

For immediate Customer Service, please call 1.800.998.2526 in the US/Canada or (+1) 419.678.8731 internationally.

The US call center operates Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM Eastern (GMT - 4:00).

Figure 5- The Horizon® Whole House Controller
Valco Companies, Inc., Locations

Valco Companies, Inc.
2710 Division Highway
P.O. Box 8
New Holland, PA 17557 USA
Phone: (+1) 717.354.4586

U.S. PLANTS AND R&D
2599 Old Philadelphia Pike
Bird-in-Hand, PA 17505 USA
Phone: (+1) 717.392.3978
210 E. Main St.
Coldwater, OH 45828, USA
Phone: (+1) 419.678.8731
2710 Division Highway
New Holland, PA 17557, USA
Phone: (+1) 717.354.4586

EUROPE
Valco B.V.
P.O. Box 76, 3410 CB Lopik
Handelsweg 1
3411 NZ, Lopik, Netherlands
Phone: (+31) 348.55.43.43

ASIA
Shanghai Val Livestock Equipment Co. Ltd.
No-5780, West Hua Xia Road
Pudong, Shanghai
P.R. China, Postal Code 201204
Phone: (+86) 21.6874.0055

Val Products India Pvt. Company
E-219, MIDC, Baramati 413133

District: Pune, Maharashtra
State, India
Phone: (+91) 2112.243539

SOUTH AMERICA
VAL-CO do Brasil Ltda.
Rua Francisco Alves de Lima, 11
São Jose dos Pinhais-PR
CEP 83015-510 - Brasil
Phone: (+55) 41-3383-3799