



MEET THE RHODES—

Maryland's Next Generation of Chicken Farmers

When Ryan and Rachel Rhodes bought a chicken and grain farm five years ago, life got awfully busy in a hurry. Guided by science, a fierce love of their industry, and a deep desire to protect the health of the birds and natural resources under their care, the Rhodes have taken chicken farming to the next level.

"The first priority was to ensure the health and quality of life of the 570,000 broilers that we planned to raise each year without the use of antibiotics," explained Ryan, who grew up on his family's nearby chicken farm and holds a degree in agriculture from University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

"We installed an energy efficient LED lighting system and windows to give our birds natural light," he said.

"It was a big ticket item," says Rachel, an Extension Educator who holds an MS in Environmental

Policy. "But in the long run it's better for the birds and the environment."

Managing the manure produced by their broilers was the next agenda item. To protect nearby streams from nutrient runoff, they applied for cost-share grants from MACS to install heavy use area pads at the entrances to their chicken houses and in front of the manure storage building.

"The concrete pads help us quickly and easily clean up any litter that escapes when baby chickens arrive or when fully-grown chickens leave," said Ryan. "They also help protect water quality during cleanouts, which is a big deal."

"Without cost-share funding from MACS this environmental upgrade would have been nearly impossible," adds Rachel.

"We have a long list of government regulations that we follow," she said. "But we always try to do the



right thing to protect the natural resources that we all depend on."

The Rhodes use a windrow system to compost litter generated between cleanouts at their chicken houses. After a few years, the litter is removed, tested for nutrient content and used as a crop fertilizer by neighboring farmers with acceptable soil phosphorus levels.

To further protect water quality, the Rhodes plant cover crops in their grain fields each fall with the help of MACS grants. They also installed native plant buffers next to their chicken houses to improve air quality and provide food and cover for pollinators.

"Environmental sustainability guides everything that we do," said Rachel.