



NEWS PHOTO BY KATHY BLY

ENERGY CHECK: John Rilett, left, Director of Energy Efficiency and Conservation with Climate Change Central talks to County of Lethbridge poultry producer John Kolk about his monitoring systems. Friday Kolk allowed his poultry barns to be used as a classroom for energy auditors being trained to do on-farm audits.

Energy audits available to local farming operations

REGION: Poultry, swine and dairy operations in the region have a unique opportunity to participate in a pilot project for energy audits.

The first group of energy auditors are currently being trained through the local Ag Tech Centre in Lethbridge and last Friday they made a field trip to John Kolk's poultry operation north of Picture Butte. John Rilett, Director of Energy Efficiency and Conservation with Climate Change Central, said the auditors are being trained to conduct energy audits on farming operations in much the same way as energy audits have been conducted for commercial operations.

The goal of the audit is to determine where energy efficiency can be increased. The audit determines where the energy is going and then provides suggestions on ways to improve efficiency.

"We look for cost effective changes."

Rilett said some farmers may be looking for easy changes that offer a quick payback while other may be considering upgrades or retrofits which could provide even more energy savings. Once completed the audit becomes a tool for producers to determine the most cost effective way to increase their energy efficiency and those reduce their input costs.

Rick Atkins, with the Ag Tech Centre, said a recommendation in the audit report can be as simple as changing a few light bulbs all the way up to a complete retrofit.

"It can also become a planning or decision tool."

The Ag Tech Centre has already completed the initial 10 audits in order to set up the program and establish baseline information. The program is similar to one operating in Ontario but in that program it only covers electrical consumption.

Atkins said locally the program looks at all of the energy input costs going into a farming operation. The program is one of a kind in western Canada. Currently there are eight auditors being trained in the program and local producers are being sought who want to have an audit completed on their operation.

"We want to build capacity within the area, in the industry," said Atkins.

The pilot project comes with a strong incentive for local producers to participate. The audit costs \$1,800 but with

funding in place the pilot project can offer it to about 100 producers for only \$200 each. Once the program is fully developed producers will be able to compare information from a variety of audits to best determine how their operation is stacking up on energy efficiency.

Rilett said there is a lot of learning and developing to come through the pilot project. The information gathered will help establish benchmarks for comparison purposes.

The majority of the funding for the pilot project is coming through Advanced Education and Technology and the Ag Tech Centre is providing technology support, testing and equipment.

Kolk already sees value in the energy audit and is looking forward to having one completed for his poultry operation. Considering energy costs have doubled and tripled in the last decade, he said the energy audit will serve as a decision making tool for producers.

"If you want to manage something, you need to measure it."

As a producer he needs to know what is working, how it is working and how it can be improved. He welcomed the opportunity to have the auditors-in-training on his farm because it gives them hands on training they don't get in a classroom or research setting.

One of the challenges in his operation is the biosecurity issues that have to be addressed before the auditors can access his poultry barns. The auditors have to glove up, wear clean coveralls and cover their heads and feet to prevent any biologicals from tracking into the barns from outside.

"They're doing a pretty comprehensive job."

Kolk said producers are always searching for credible information to base decisions on and an energy audit can give them a fact based baseline. In his own poultry operation his management program works on tracking every animal, feed consumption, water consumption and overall health. Now the same approach can be done for energy consumption.

"We've never figured out kilowatt hours per pound of chicken."

Anyone interested in taking part in the program and booking an audit can call the Ag Tech Centre at 329-1212 or check out the information on line at www.onfarmenergy.ca.