2020 USPOULTRY Human Resources Webinar: COVID-19
Updates and Preparing for the Future

TUCKER, Ga. – Sept. 3, 2020 – Office life, meetings and conferences have looked much different for everyone in 2020, and this year’s USPOULTRY Human Resources Seminar was no different. Using video conferencing software, attendees were able to virtually attend the seminar while submitting questions to the speakers for Q&A sessions after each presentation.

An “EEOC Update” was offered by Evangeline Hawthorne, director of the EEOC field office in Tampa, Florida. Hawthorne’s update gave an informative view of recent changes in discrimination laws, as well as discussed how those changes apply to employers’ responsibilities throughout the COVID-19 crisis. “Employers should remember that the guidance from public health authorities is likely to change. EEOC is evolving alongside the pandemic, so employers also should stay informed and connected as things shift,” Hawthorne encouraged. “From where we started in March to now, there’s much more information to work with and very different discussions happening. Things are constantly in flux.”

A different perspective on the pandemic was offered by Jim Wimberly and Larry Stine, legal counsel from Wimberly, Lawson, Steckel, Schneider & Stine PC. They discussed how COVID-19 has impacted poultry industry labor and human resources management. Their joint discussion covered a myriad of topics, including unemployment statistics, government aid, COVID safety measures and executive orders.

“Employers are worried about the legal consequences if an employee catches the virus or about what will happen if they are unable to perfectly keep up with the constantly changing guidelines. These fears are understandable but somewhat misplaced. With how much the virus has spread and how much people are out and about, it is nearly impossible to prove where someone contracted the virus. From a legal perspective, the issue that will be discussed most in court is whether there is proof of gross negligence. There’s a world of difference between an employer that willfully violates safety precautions and an employer that is trying their absolute best but falls just short of the guidelines,” Wimberly commented.

Mike Giles, president of the Georgia Poultry Federation, focused his attention forward to the future of the poultry industry, emphasizing the importance of community and educational outreach when it comes to industry recruitment. “We had a talk at a local high school in Gainesville a couple years back where we spoke to a class of about 30 students and asked how many of them were considering a career in the poultry industry. Not a single hand went up. If not a single student could see a career path available to them in the poultry industry, even in a state considered to be the poultry capital of the world, it means that we have a lot of work to do. The opportunities are there, we just have to show them,” said Giles.

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U.S. Poultry & Egg Association (USPOULTRY) is the All Feather Association progressively serving its poultry and egg members through research, education, communications and technical services. Founded in 1947, USPOULTRY is based in Tucker, Georgia.

Photo caption: Evangeline Hawthorne, director of the EEOC field office in Tampa, Florida