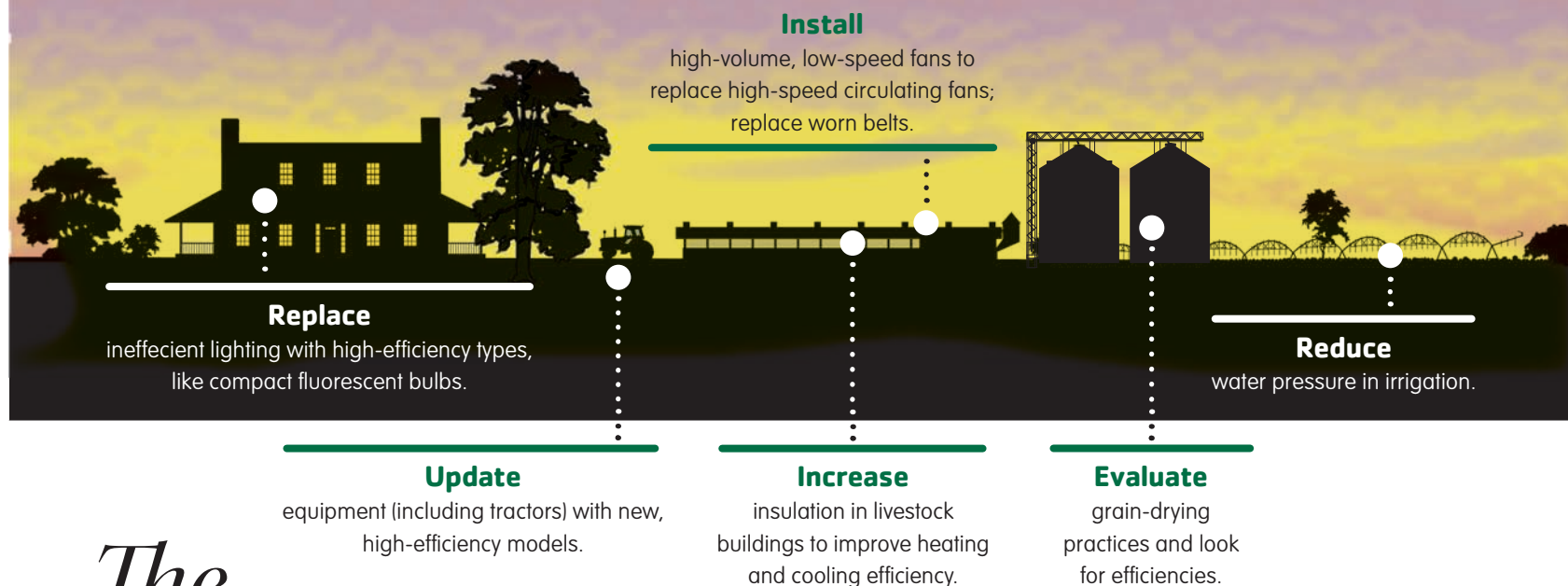


.....“ Timeliness is the most important thing. There’s a window of opportunity when you harvest. ” see page 30 >>

farmstead



The Good Kind of Audit

With grants and expert help available, energy audits can save big money by helping you be more efficient. BY CHRIS HILL

FARMERS ARE NO STRANGERS TO BEING FRUGAL—it’s second nature to most—and that certainly includes energy usage. Even so, most producers, whether they run crop or livestock operations, can still benefit from a little self-examination and help from industry experts.

“It all goes back to money—it goes back to cash flow,” says Debbie Whitlock, a poultry grower near Madison, Ga. Whitlock, who currently operates four chicken houses and recently purchased three more, had an energy audit conducted this spring through assistance from engineers at the University of Georgia.

As a result of the audit, Whitlock implemented several changes, including switching from forced-air furnaces to brooders for keeping the birds warm. She’s also done some obvious things, such as increase attic insulation in the houses and change to more efficient lighting. In addition, she’s closing up the

curtain-sided houses with insulated walls in order to convert them to tunnel ventilation. This will help keep the birds cool during warm months, without requiring a heavy electrical load.

Whitlock expects to know later this year exactly how much she’s saving, but she’s already seeing some benefit in her electric bill from the changes in lighting. As she notes, big changes aren’t always required. “Some things will definitely pay for themselves,” she says. “If you look at them, they’re really small costs up front, but give big savings over time.”

First Steps

Private companies, such as the Vermont-based EnSave (ensave.com), can help with audits, but producers may find it beneficial to go closer to home. That’s what Whitlock did in contacting engineers in the Department of Biological and Agricultural