

The Government's implementation of its Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) has been heavily criticised by industry leaders after numerous delays, but the scheme is working wonders for a Northamptonshire poultry farmer. **Olivia Midgley** reports from the farm in Isham.

RHI scheme helps to halve poultry farm's outgoings

It may have been blasted as the weakest of the Government's renewable energy incentives, but for those fortunate enough to have developed the right technology at the right capacity, the RHI is worth its weight in gold.

Forward-thinking Alun Dicks looked into biomass boilers five years ago when he was searching for the best way to heat nine large poultry sheds, while dealing with the issues of humidity and harmful emissions which arise from using a traditional system of direct fired heaters.

Rising fuel bills were also a major concern.

Mr Dicks says: "We were using 150,000 litres of liquefied petroleum gas, plus 65,000 litres of oil per year, so we were spending £150,000 a year just

on oil and gas. With the boiler we are eliminating that.

"The fuel costs are half and we are also getting the RHI. We have basically cut our outgoings by 50 per cent.

"Just with the RHI alone we will have paid back in seven years and that is without the chickens and the fuel savings."

The boiler cost £700,000 to install.

Feed savings

In addition, Mr Dicks expects to save at least one day of feed per crop as the chicks will reach target weight quicker and with fewer losses in numbers due to the withdrawal of the harmful emissions caused by the old heaters.

"Bird welfare now is on a different planet," he says. "It is



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ALUN DICKS

such a different environment now in the sheds."

The old oil and gas heaters were creating CO₂, NO_x and

other harmful gasses, as well as a damp atmosphere.

"The heaters were putting out a lot of CO₂ so we had to remove it by putting ventilation in, but that reduced the temperature inside, so we had to put more heat in.

"Our system now produces a much better atmosphere in the sheds."

Each shed has two fans fitted with a heater coil in front of them, heated by the hot water which circulates at 95degC.

"The fans are running continuously and as the shed computer asks for heat it sends a message to the boiler," he says.

"When it gets hot enough it shuts the valve. The ideal temperature is 32degC and we can get to that in four hours.

"The insulation is beyond belief. This is important because



Alun Dicks says the biomass boiler 'very much looks after itself'.

the Government is not going to pay you the RHI when you are losing heat."

Construction

Rural Energy started building the system in April last year and it was completed that December.

Most of the pipe work had to be done inside the sheds and that could only be done in the clean-out circle.

"It was a bit manic trying to fit it in when we had such a specific one-week time window," says Mr Dicks. ▶

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