



# AgSpeak™

Vol. 6, No. 2



p4 . . . . .Predators and Traps

p8 . . . . .Floor Eggs

p10 . . . . .Grower Spotlight

p12 . . . . .Clean Eggs From the  
Breeder House



Engineering  
**New Products** to  
Make Your Life Easier



**WATERING • FEEDING • CONTROLS • VENTILATION**

Toll Free: **800-99VALCO (800-998-2526)** • Phone: **(+1) 419-678-8731**

Email: **marcom@val-co.com** • Website: **www.val-co.com**



VAL-CO® strives to serve agriculture with innovative equipment of the highest quality. We know that farmers and growers are working hard day in and day out. They need equipment that is reliable and that helps them reach the highest performance levels. Our product development team is focused on these two requirements – reliability and performance.

The last two years have been an especially challenging time for producers and for equipment companies like VAL-CO. But we have maintained our commitment to product improvements and new product development. There are game-changing products now undergoing test in every product family – watering, feeding, nesting, ventilation, and controls.

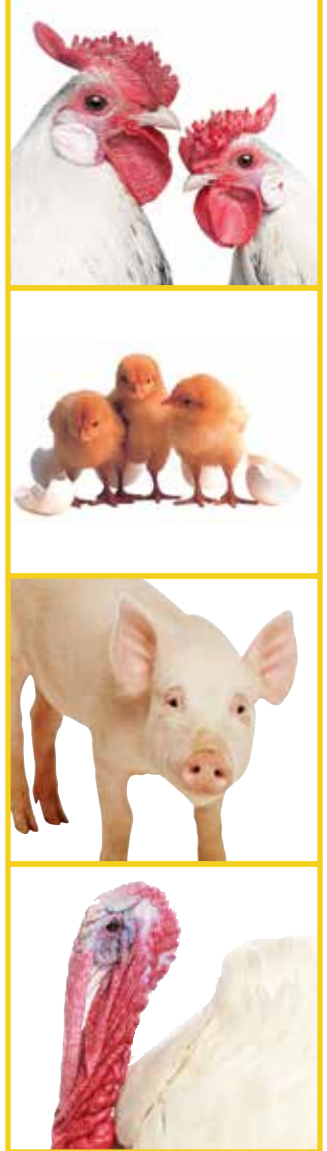
The Fortica® controller for use in cage-free facilities provides a hint of what is coming and is presented in this issue of AgSpeak. This issue also introduces our professional quality live traps for pest control. These products are now available through our dealer network to growers nationwide.

As we look forward to the New Year in 2022, our commitment to serve agriculture is as strong as ever. Top-quality products and service from VAL-CO will help you finish on top!

**Phil Risser**

*President & CEO*

Valco Industries, Inc.







## Flock Safety

### Predators and Traps

by *Ericka Mongeau*

Free range flocks have many challenges, perhaps the greatest of which is predators. Predators come in all sizes and include everything from the small wiry mink to thrifty raccoons, to slick foxes and coyotes. Each predator has its own hunting habits and a signature pattern.

#### **Mink & Weasel:**

If your farm is near a water way, there's a chance mink or weasel will stop by. Mink often feed on fish, birds, frogs, rodents, and crustaceans. They are quick on land, nimble climbers, and great swimmers. Stealthy, vicious predators of chickens, they often kill many at a time, and only drink their blood. They attack any time of day, are difficult to deter, and won't

hesitate to come back. You may find several birds killed and piled neatly together with signs of attack on only the head.

Weasels kill chickens when there aren't enough smaller rodents available, like moles, voles, mice, and rats. They hunt through movement; rodents know this and stop moving when one is nearby. If they turn to chickens out of desperation, they will often kill many birds at a time, because of the frenzied movement.

To keep your flock safe, keep them in a secure coop with no gaps big enough for them to gain access through. Minks can crawl through holes and gaps as small as 1 inch in diameter. Minks are also excellent

at digging allowing them to go under fences. Clean up uneaten food because the smell of rotting food is attractive to mink. Remove hiding spots such as brush, bushes, or wood piles that are close to the enclosure.

#### **Raccoons, Opossums, & Skunks:**

Raccoons, opossums, and skunks are nocturnal and opportunistic. They might only attack one bird per visit. Raccoons go for the head, neck, and crop while opossums and skunks prefer the belly, or sometimes just go for the eggs.

Raccoons are thrifty little bandits. Their hands are super sensitive, and they can identify and understand objects just by feeling them. They

have opposable thumbs so they can grab, hold, twist and turn objects with ease. They are omnivores and scavengers and will eat just about anything, and they will work out the easiest way to get to it.

In the fall, raccoons eat more nuts and fruits to help store fat for the winter. In the spring and summer, they enjoy protein in the form of insects, worms, and rodents, or baby chicks if they can find them. Adult chickens are generally too large to carry off for a meal, so they will eat only the head and crop, leaving the body behind.

Opossums are not as wily as raccoons. They can climb fences or dig beneath them, but struggle with opening locks or latches. They can fit through very small openings compared to their body size, and even if they can't fit, they will reach their limbs through and grab what they can.

Opossums are an essential part of the ecosystem and North America's only marsupial. They consume snakes, insects, snails, slugs, mice, rats, and other small animals, which if plentiful, will leave chickens in relative safety. Opossums, if a nuisance, should be trapped and relocated, rather than killed.

These creatures seek out trash or loose grain, including cat food, dog food, or bird seed in wild bird feeders. Be sure to keep bins secure

and spills swept up. In some states it may be illegal to kill or relocate raccoons and opossums, and no one wants to get too close to a skunk. Prevention is the best medicine.

### **Fox & Coyote:**

The sly fox hasn't earned the title for nothing. Foxes will attack chickens, but they will first learn everything they can about their target. They'll learn the coop, run, access points, and even the schedule and habits of the birds and their guardians.

If the farm is near dense forest or sits on a large property, foxes may become a problem. They can climb but prefer to dig. They can run 30 or more miles per hour and leap up to 15 feet in the air, so fencing is rarely an obstacle. Foxes are singular hunters and will bide their time, stalk quietly, and strike when a single bird, or small group of birds, strays from safety.

Coyotes are tenacious, nocturnal hunters that often run in pack. They don't seek out chickens exclusively; in fact, they will eat just about anything, including rabbits, deer, lambs, fish, frogs, and insects. They are opportunistic eaters. If it is too challenging to get to the chickens, they will move on and eat elsewhere.

Fox and coyote can be difficult to catch since birds are often carried away and there is little evidence to show for an attack other than a



*A wide variety of traps available from Safeguard Products*

diminishing head count. They use tall grass as cover while stalking. Keeping grass shorter can help deter them. Use tall fencing with a buried perimeter to keep them out of a run. Foxes hunt in the early morning and late evening, and coyotes prefer to hunt at night, so birds kept inside during these times are usually safe from these predators.

### **Rodents:**

While obviously not a predator, they are detrimental to flock welfare. They are carriers of some 45 diseases and are capable of contaminating farm feed and water supplies, spreading disease from contaminated to uncontaminated areas and from animal to animal. It has been estimated that rodents can increase poultry feed usage by as much as 2%.

The upper incisor teeth of rodents continue to grow throughout their life. Mice and rats must chew constantly to keep their teeth from





becoming too long, which is part of the reason they damage insulation, wood, curtains, and electrical wiring. This frequent gnawing can cause equipment malfunctions, power outages, and fires as a result of short circuits when wires are chewed on. Rodent populations have been suspected to be the cause of 25–50% of all barn fires.

The first step to solving the predator problem is learning to identify what predators are a problem. Here's how to prevent repeat visits:

1. *Determine the identity of the predator*
2. *Eliminate the point of entry*
3. *Eliminate the source of the problem*

Free range flocks will always benefit from having a guard. Herding dogs

like German Shepherds or Great Pyrenees are friendly family dogs and fierce protectors of livestock. Strong sturdy fencing that is buried at least 18" below the ground will help deter the animals that prefer to dig their way in. If left with no other option than trapping, consider using live animal traps and relocating the animals to a better environment. Be sure to check local guidelines about how to trap, relocate, or eliminate the predator on hand. Some animals are protected species and require professional intervention.



*Safeguard offers a full line of humane animal traps that are proudly made in the USA and are available wherever VAL-CO Products are sold!*

## Stop Squirreling Around!



Squirrel Controller w/ Multi-Catch Extender



**Let them remove themselves!**

With easy-to-use Squirrel Controllers from Safeguard, mounting wings allow attachment over entry hole. Catch even more critters with the Multi-Catch Extender.

A one-way gate lets the animal easily exit, but prevents them from returning. Catch even more critters with the Multi-Catch Extender.

Safeguard Products offers a wide range of humane traps in various styles and sizes, all pre-assembled and ready to use, to best suit your nuisance wildlife needs. Call your local Safeguard representative or distributor for more information on our entire line of traps, proudly manufactured in the U.S.A.



A VAL-CO Product

PO Box 8, New Holland, PA 17557

Phone: 800.433.1819 • Website: [www.safeguardproducts.com](http://www.safeguardproducts.com)



Contact our  
ventilation experts to get  
maximum efficiency!

Interested in  
Saving \$\$\$?



Available in Fiberglass, Sable™,  
Z-Material, or Galvanized housings



## The Variable-Speed V-Fan™ Is Available in Various Models!

### Why you need it:

- Delivers up to **34,600 CFM<sup>1</sup>** at top speeds
- Provides up to **62.7 CFM/Watt<sup>2</sup>** at low speeds
- Direct drive motor means less maintenance
- May be eligible for Energy Rebates in certain areas

<sup>1</sup> - BESS Test #19475 @ 0.10" WC    <sup>2</sup> - BESS Test #19461 @ 0.05" WC

**WATERING • FEEDING • CONTROLS • VENTILATION**

Toll Free: **800-99VALCO (800-998-2526)** • Phone: **(+1) 419-678-8731**

Email: **marcom@val-co.com** • Website: **www.val-co.com**







## Breeders

## Floor Eggs

Floor laying can cause problems with labor and egg quality. Eggs laid on the floor often increase the labor cost associated with picking them up. Floor eggs are often cracked or dirty. These eggs are then unusable and decrease the overall profit of the operation.

If a small irritation occurs when hens are learning where to lay their eggs, they may choose another, less desirable location. Often, they continue to lay in that same location throughout their life, and other hens may follow suit. Floor laying is habitual, and once it becomes routine, there is no way to stop it.

It's necessary to discourage floor eggs from the start. Or rather, encourage nest usage. An inviting nest system will encourage hens to

lay their eggs in it. Good husbandry practices, like frequently walking the birds in the beginning of the lay period, may also encourage hens to move towards the nest.

Open floor systems that use a community nest may unintentionally encourage floor

laying. There is more litter to kick into a nest and there are more shadows to hide in. Community nest systems often average around 100 floor eggs per day and may get into the thousands if not managed properly. Aviary systems have shown to have better results in reducing floor eggs, often averaging





only 10-15 floor eggs per day if lights are set up properly.

The primary factor in controlling floor eggs, no matter the kind of system, is consistent, thorough husbandry. Here are some tips on controlling floor laying.

### 1. *Limit litter levels.*

Ideally one inch will be adequate. It lets hens scratch and dust bathe but is not deep enough to be scratched into a nest.

### 2. *Get familiar with the nest.*

Birds naturally want to lay eggs where they feel secure. Give them time to learn their surroundings and where the nest boxes are located before they start to lay.

### 3. *Open them late.*

Wait until the first egg has been laid before opening the nest. This teaches birds that nests are for nesting, not for resting.

### 4. *Take a walk.*

Walk the hen house two to three times per day for the first two weeks of lay and roust any birds that are brooding or nesting anywhere except in the nest boxes.

### 5. *Provide enough nest boxes.*

Hens don't like to fight for space, they'll just lay somewhere else. Make sure there is plenty of rooms for everyone to find a comfortable spot to lay. Nests should have soft substrate, be dark, and be readily available.

### 6. *Check your lights.*

Hens like to lay in dark places. Brighten up the scratch areas, adjust lights to reduce shadows and dim the nest boxes.

### 7. *Collect the floor eggs.*

They will happen. Birds will lay where other birds have laid, so collecting the eggs two to three times per day from the floor. Remember to keep floor eggs out of the nests, they are dirty and carry a high bacteria load. Nests will remain cleaner if floor eggs are not placed back into them.



Multiple setup options  
to best suit your needs!

## Want To Minimize Floor Eggs?

Introducing the Spacious, Very Inviting **Liberty One Aviary™** Colony Nesting System

#### *Why you need it:*

- A 7° nest floor pitch allows eggs to gently roll onto a roomy 12" belt helping to reduce cracking
- Black curtains provide an ideal environment for laying eggs
- Durable and easy to clean



*The wide open, yet dark spaces, are very inviting to your hens.*

**WATERING • FEEDING • HOUSING • VENTILATION**

Toll Free: **800-99VALCO (800-998-2526)** • Phone: **(+1) 419-678-8731**

Email: **marcom@val-co.com** • Website: **www.val-co.com**



# Grower Spotlight

## Joe Landrum

Hog farmer. Chicken farmer.  
Cattle farmer. Crop farmer.  
Businessman. Family man.  
Advocate.

There isn't much that Joe Landrum doesn't do on his family farm in Warren, Indiana. When he first began farming, he ran a farrow-to-finish hog farm. When times got tough, he looked to diversify. After shopping around with different companies, he settled on a contract with Hy-Line raising breeder hens. Twenty years later, the farm is still primarily run by family, with the occasional hired hand for house clean out or grain harvest.

Joe speaks frankly of the changes he sees in rural communities. As more people move away from populous towns to the farming

communities where livestock vastly outnumber people, he's seen many new residents surprised about rural farm-town life. "It's a challenge to educate non-farmers from non-farming communities on farming practice. The number one goal is to take care of the animals, and we strive to do it in the best way possible for the community and the environment." As a cattleman with a herd of 50 who graze by the road, Joe finds time to stop and talk to the people that come by and watch. "I stop and talk, and so many ask questions and I get to inform them about why we do what we do. It's a great part of the education process."

Joe is certainly dedicated to caring for his animals. He takes the time

to learn the ins and outs of his equipment, like his VAL-CO flat chain feeding system, watering system, or 36" sidewall fans.

"I had some issues when I started. But there's a learning curve for everything, and once I learned the equipment, there were fewer problems."

It helps that Joe has never been hesitant to lean on his support team, including his dealership A1 Ag, and the VAL-CO Technical Support team. "When my flat chain system was first installed, the temper of the steel was wrong, but it was quickly made right. I've frequently called Tech Support for help with my GainTrac Controller and they have always been great. I was once sent, by my dealer, to the VAL-CO plant in Coldwater,





Ohio to pick up a fan part, and every single person I met there was just incredible. The tech gave me the best service, walked me back to where he was building the fans, and gave me the part I needed. Service is really everything, and it's always been great."

A source of infinite wisdom it seems, Joe has a piece of advice for everyone. What's his secret to successful farming? Dedication. "You have to be dedicated. Livestock is a 24/7 job. You always have to be available. If your heart is in it, you can make anything happen. If you love it, it's not work."



**VAL-CO Breeder Drinkers**  
**Give the Right Amount of Water**



**Up Action Only**  
**Keeps Your**  
**Floors Drier**



*Available in Standard  
and Low Flow Models*

SCAN OR VISIT  
[val-co.it/brdwtr](http://val-co.it/brdwtr)



**WATERING • FEEDING • HOUSING • VENTILATION**

Toll Free: **800-99VALCO (800-998-2526)** • Phone: **(+1) 419-678-8731**

Email: **marcom@val-co.com** • Website: **www.val-co.com**



## Resources

# Clean Eggs From the Breeder House

by *Ericka Mongeau*

The health and well being of broiler birds is contingent on the cleanliness of eggs laid in the breeder house. Optimal eggs are laid in the nest, where they are kept clean from debris and safely transported from the nest to the storage room.

Floor eggs are bound to happen, but too many floor eggs affect hatchability and profits. Floor laying becomes habitual. It's important to prevent it from the start.

The first step is to train pullets during rearing. Providing them perches to climb on ensures they are strong enough to jump onto slats and find the nests. Pullets should be moved into the laying barn at least two weeks before the onset of lay so they can get adjusted to their new surroundings.

Keep nests closed until the first egg is laid. If nests are opened too soon the nest become a resting place rather than a laying place. Nests should be comfortable, dark, and readily available. An inadequate amount of nest space will lead hens to find an alternative place to lay, like the litter.

Keeping litter levels low, around one to two inches, prohibits hens from scratching the litter into a nest.

### *Nest pads*

The nest is the first stage of an egg's journey through the house. The nest pads are the landing area for the eggs, and they are bound to get dirty. Astroturf nest pads are designed to allow dirt and manure to fall away from the surface of the pad.

Pads should be cleaned between each flock. Pads can be washed in a bucket with soap and water or washed with a hose or power washer. Always disinfect after cleaning.

If pads are too worn – they have flat spots that prohibit the egg from rolling on to the belt – consider replacing the pads.

### *Egg belts*

The egg makes its journey out of the house on the egg belt. It's important the belt is clean. Egg belts carry more than just eggs; they carry dirt, feathers, and manure as well. Polypropylene egg belts have large holes that allow dirt and debris to fall away from the eggs.

Plastic belts are easy to clean with just a broom and some warm soapy water.



## WORN NESTING PADS ARE COSTING YOU MONEY

Replace Your Worn Pads Today and:

- ✓ Maximize HE/HH
- ✓ Increase Hatch Bonus
- ✓ Increase Hatchability
- ✓ Reduce Rejected Eggs

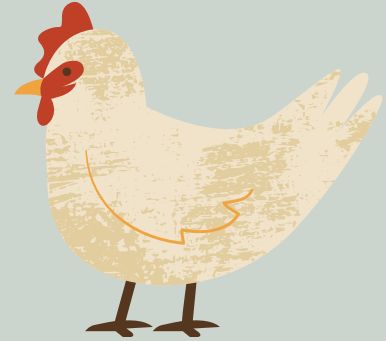
**AstroTurf**  
**POULTRY**  
NESTING PADS

Get Genuine AstroTurf® Replacement Pads  
at your local VAL-CO® Dealer and see the  
difference for yourself!



# PREVENT FLOOR EGGS

Floor laying is habitual, and once it becomes routine, there is no way to stop it. Therefore, good nest setup and maintenance is necessary from the very beginning.



## 1 PROVIDE ENRICHMENT

Perches and platforms teach pullets how to navigate a laying house where they will have to jump onto slats to reach the nesting area.

## 2 TRANSITION PULLETS EARLY

Move pullets to the laying house approximately two weeks before the onset of lay so that they can adjust to their new surroundings and learn the location of feed and water.

## 3 OPEN NESTS LATE

By waiting until you see the first egg has been laid, birds learn that the nest is for nesting, not for resting.

## 4 KEEP NESTS COMFORTABLE

Nests should have soft substrate, be dark, and be readily available. Large nest boxes with comfortable nesting material is welcoming to hens.

## 5 KEEP BIRDS HEALTHY

Achieve and maintain the appropriate body condition throughout the rearing and laying process. Good health decreases floor eggs, diseases, and leg health issues.

## 6 KEEP LITTER LOW

Litter is necessary for welfare, but too much litter encourages floor eggs. Keep litter between 1-2" prevents it from being scratched into a nest.

## 7 PICK UP THE EGGS

Some floor eggs are bound to happen, and hens are encouraged to lay where other eggs are present. Picking them up as soon as possible discourages other hens from laying on the floor.



# In The Spotlight

## Employees

**Name:**

Lance Johnson

**Position:**

Territory Sales Manager –  
KY, TN, MO, AR

**Where were you born?**

Central Kentucky

**Hobbies:**

Simple Folk things: Hunt, fish, farm,  
kayak, sports with the kids

**Favorite family tradition:**

Deer season and holidays at our  
farm cabin.

**First Job:**

Started working on farms when I was  
12 and did so through college. First  
career related job was with Perdue  
Foods in Parent Breeders where I  
spent almost 13 years.

**Biggest pet peeve:**

Probably people who are not  
generally appreciative.

**Describe yourself in 5 words:**

Creative, energetic, humorous,  
spontaneous, thoughtful

**If you were an animal, what would you be?**

Wolf. Wolves life cycles are very  
similar to how I see my progression in  
life. They are dependent on a strong  
network in which they contribute  
differently as their lives progress.  
Starting from playful youth, progress  
into worker / servant, spend time as a  
leader, and eventually are provided for  
by stronger members of the pack.

**If you could share a meal with anyone, living or dead, who would it be and why?**

This would probably be the hardest  
decision of my life. My grandmother  
and stepfather are my initial reaction  
because they shaped me into the  
person I am today and have both  
passed. But knowing I already carry  
and am passing down their gifts I  
would have to look at bigger picture  
and choose a figure that could provide  
me tools to change the paths of the  
generations in my family behind me.  
After much thought on this I would  
currently choose Theodore Roosevelt.  
Without dragging this on any longer,  
T.R. was a man that walked many  
paths but always emerged a selfless  
leader of positive change. I admire  
his love for agriculture and nature  
and the lasting impact he brought  
to those areas. But my time would  
be spent learning how he motivated  
people to follow his vision. How he

navigated hard decisions. Where he  
garnered the strength to see the hard  
things through.

**What changes have you seen in your years in the industry?**

Biggest change I have seen is the  
increased focus on animals welfare.  
Social media has given consumers  
a greater voice and ability to impact  
company reputation. These voices are  
driving major change in the animal  
protein industry from medication  
usage, feed strategy, haul & harvest  
methods, etc.

**What technology do you see coming in the industry?**

Our industry is being driven more and  
more by consumer demands toward  
animal “happiness”. I think we will  
see strong progression in promoting  
natural animal behavior through  
growing conditions, enhancements,  
and tools to monitor conditions.

**What excites you about your work and makes it easy for you to come to everyday?**

At my core I am a servant. Being a  
servant has elevated me to leadership  
opportunities but at the end of the  
day I am driven to support others.  
In my position I am constantly  
challenged to provide people with  
solutions to needs or problems. These  
solutions are only effective through  
great service!! VAL-CO is a service  
driven team and I am proud to be a  
piece of their puzzle.



## Products

### Smart VX™ Expansion Station



The **Smart VX™** Expansion Station works with either the newly-introduced Fortica® controls or the Ventra XT™ line of controllers providing built-in relay control of fans, curtain machines, feed lines, lights – everything in a barn. The innovative relay design incorporates built-in current sensing to provide real-time feedback of motor amps (True RMS amps) and on-board processors permit tracking curtain and inlet movement even when manually overridden with the on-board switches.

### Fortica® Whole House Controller

The **Fortica®** is an extremely user-friendly and universal poultry automation system. The full touchscreen operation makes this system extremely user friendly and clear. This all-in-one system is suitable for all types of broilers, layers, breeders and pullets. It regulates, controls and monitors all your poultry house processes, such as climate, feed, water, lighting, animal weight, and egg count. A new Energy Mode maximizes savings you can get by using



variable speed fans. The improved Precision Heating setting provide greater efficiency and will help you save propane. The Fortica® system can also be linked to a remote app and innovative Farm Management software, which helps provide easy tech support.

### Poly Hopper

VAL-CO has released a new, very durable **Poly Hopper** that is lightweight and easy to take on and off when needed. This is yet another VAL-CO product engineered to make your life easier!



## Stay Informed! FREE Subscription to VAL-CO AgSpeak™

Just fill out the form below and fax it to us at (717) 355-2505, scan and email it to [marcom@val-co.com](mailto:marcom@val-co.com), or just send us an email with your name, company and mailing address and we'll send you VAL-CO AgSpeak for FREE! Stay informed... subscribe today!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



VAL-CO Products are  
proudly available at our  
**2022 Titanium Dealers**



**Marydel**  
Ag Supply



Marydel, DE  
302-343-9541 • [marydelag.com](mailto:marydelag.com)

**Batesville Poultry  
Equipment**

Batesville, AR  
870-793-7855 • [bpe\\_steven@yahoo.com](mailto:bpe_steven@yahoo.com)



Oxford, AL • Clark, AL  
Luverne, AL • Laurel, MS  
Forest, MS • Brookhaven, MS  
Franklinville, NC  
Rockingham, NC  
256-831-3532 • [farmsystemsinc.com](http://farmsystemsinc.com)

**Zeiset**  
Equipment



Manheim, PA • Beaver Springs, PA • Moorefield, WV  
717-665-4056 • [zeisetequip.com](http://zeisetequip.com)



Russellville, KY  
270-717-1149 • [premieragsupply.com](http://premieragsupply.com)

Find a dealer near you  
[val-co.it/dealer](http://val-co.it/dealer)



**WATERING • FEEDING • CONTROLS • VENTILATION**

Toll Free: **800-99VALCO (800-998-2526)** • Phone: **(+1) 419-678-8731**

Email: [sales@val-co.com](mailto:sales@val-co.com) • Website: [www.val-co.com](http://www.val-co.com)

