

Correction: This story incorrectly included a representative for U.S. Rep. Markwayne Mullin as a member of the Coordinating Council. The story has been corrected. As registration requests for new poultry feeding operations in eastern Oklahoma ebbed the past month, the state Board of Agriculture on Monday announced an immediate moratorium on processing new registrations. The announcement comes about a week after the first meeting of the newly formed Coordinating Council on Poultry Growth, which was announced last month by Gov. Mary Fallin and Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Bill John Baker as a means to address concerns raised by eastern Oklahoma residents. "This will give us time to take a pause and ascertain some things so that we can have a more structured growth of the poultry industry," Secretary of Agriculture Jim Reese said Monday. "Registrations had slowed down significantly, with none in September, and we thought it was a good time to take a pause and ensure that the poultry industry is able to grow without the concerns that have occurred. I believe that can be done." With an explosion of new chicken houses, residents grew more concerned about water quality and supply, property values, road maintenance and air quality. "We expect to be able to resolve at least some of the issues," Reese added. "We don't expect it to be a long pause." In community meetings held biweekly in July and August, area residents called for an immediate solution. A moratorium was not announced sooner, with a number of houses in various stages of applying or being approved, Reese said. "It's hard to just turn on a dime and change direction real quick, because a lot of people were in various stages of seeking farms," he said. "We wanted to make certain we weren't adversely affecting a whole lot of people on both sides." Working out issues is important not only for the community but for an agriculture industry that holds a value on par with that of winter wheat and swine in Oklahoma, he said. The five-year annual average for cash receipts in Oklahoma "money paid to farmers from sales, government programs and insurance" are \$835 million for poultry, \$927

million for hogs and \$608 million for winter wheat, he said. Department data show that 41 site applications were processed, for a total of 207 new poultry houses, in the past 12 months in eastern Oklahoma, most in the northeast and the vast majority, 120, in Delaware County. "At this time only one application still is pending," Reese said. Pam Kingfisher, an organizer of the Spring Creek Guardians community group, said people were happy to see the Agriculture Department announcement Monday. "I think we would just say kudos to the new poultry council," she said. "We understood from our last community meetings that our asking for a stoppage would be discussed, and we submitted a 400-signature petition to the department the last week of September along these lines, so this is a start." Reese said the council, chaired by Reese and Cherokee Nation Secretary of Natural Resources Sara Hill, is only advisory in nature and that names of council members would not be released and meetings would not be open to the press or the public. Represented on the council are integrator companies; poultry producers; Oklahoma Poultry Federation; Oklahoma Farm Bureau; American Farmers and Ranchers; Oklahoma Water Resources Board; Grand River Dam Authority; Oklahoma Conservation Commission; Department of Agriculture and Forestry; Secretary of Environment and Energy Michael Teague's office; experts from Oklahoma State University and the University of Arkansas; a Cherokee Nation representative; nine local community members; state Sen. Wayne Shaw, R-Grove; and State Rep. Josh West, R-Grove. Congressman Markwayne Mullin has requested a position for a staff member on the council as well but his office reports an invitation has not yet been extended. Other agencies and experts, such as the Department of Environmental Quality, will be asked to attend on an as-needed basis, he said. Early considerations tackled by the council focused on "siting criteria," Reese said. "Basically (it) talks about being a good neighbor." A PowerPoint presentation from Oklahoma State and University of Arkansas speakers at the first meeting discussed early-on relates to set-backs, proper drainage, water supply, vegetative buffers to control dust and smells, and other factors. Reese said new registration guidelines could become part of the state's process

as a result of the talks. In coming weeks officials with the Oklahoma Water

Resource Board will be meeting with community members, visiting several wells that are having problems and reporting to the council in meetings likely held on a monthly basis.

The Cherokee Nation issued a statement applauding the Agriculture Board's decision to temporarily suspend the acceptance of new poultry farm permits. "This allows time for the tribe, state of Oklahoma and area residents to work together on a plan for responsible growth of the poultry industry in many eastern Oklahoma counties," the statement says. Chuck Hoskin Jr., Cherokee Nation secretary of state, said that "with this suspension in place and the Coordinating Council on Poultry Growth bringing together agricultural interests and concerned neighbors, there are great opportunities to improve the balance of interests between the agricultural industry and the eastern Oklahoma communities where many new poultry feeding operations have been built over the last year." "This suspension is truly welcomed by the Cherokee Nation," said Principal Chief Bill John Baker. "This pause is a meaningful step that allows thoughtful changes to public policy be proposed, if the council finds changes are needed. We look forward to continuing to work with the state of Oklahoma and local stakeholders to protect investment in agriculture and local communities." Kelly Bostian 918-581-8357 kelly.bostian@tulsaworld.com