

Maintenance extends bulb life

WE have suffered through the annual “switch” (pun intended) for daylight savings once again, which means the season of dwindling daylight has arrived. This is a reminder that the most important factor of good farm lighting is safety, but cost, efficiency and ease of maintenance are also key.

“More efficient fixtures, a longer bulb



Farm Energy

By DANA PETERSEN

life and more lumens per watt can all make a difference,” says Jim Sayers, di-

rector of energy services, Corn Belt Power Cooperative. “This is especially true in locations where your lights are on many hours a day, subject to cold temperatures, or where more light means better farm safety.”

When it comes to safety, indoor and outdoor farm lighting is increasingly important during late fall, winter and early spring. As days grow shorter, there is less

and less natural light available to suit our schedules during the harvest season. Likewise, all the dust kicked up during harvest is likely to accumulate in and around farm buildings. This may require some extra attention for your farmstead lighting.

“Harvest creates a lot of dust that may obscure the surfaces of skylights, windows and light fixtures commonly found in farm buildings,” says Jay Harmon, Iowa State University professor in ag and biosystems engineering. “To maintain a safe, well-lit working environment throughout the year, try to keep those surfaces clear of dust.”

Clean, maintain fixtures

As you make plans to winterize the farmstead, be sure to clean light fixtures and wipe down windows. Not only will this brighten up your buildings, but it will also extend the life of your lighting.

“Dust, humidity and fluctuating temperatures can shorten bulb life and reduce output from light fixtures over time,” says Harmon. “Since lamps and fixtures on the farmstead are often exposed to humidity and other extreme conditions, maintenance and cleaning can extend their use.”

When possible, Harmon recommends keeping fixtures and bulbs clean to reduce potential damage from overheating and to improve light output. This will maintain the efficiency of your lighting and help minimize costs over time. Cleaning the surfaces of skylights and windows will also maximize any available natural light.

In addition to cleaning and maintenance, upgrading your farm lighting can improve your energy efficiency while also minimizing costs. Dave Warrington, ag representative for Alliant Energy, says he’s seen an increase in LED installations (light-emitting diodes) this year for livestock buildings and farm shops across Iowa.

Improve energy efficiency

“Our customers are reporting that the combination of decreasing costs for LED lighting and energy savings of 40% or more is pretty compelling,” says Warrington. “When you also include the Alliant Energy rebates, more and more of these farm lighting projects are making sense economically, and we have seen many new installations added to farms in 2013.”

Compared to incandescent bulbs, both LEDs and compact fluorescent lamps, or CFLs, save energy because they require significantly less electricity to produce the same amount of lumens. Beginning this January, the 40W and 60W incandescent bulbs will no longer be sold by retailers.

If you make changes to farm lighting, remember to follow electrical codes and hire a licensed electrician, if necessary. Don’t forget to ask your local electric utility provider about available rebates. Some lighting rebates may expire by 2014, so don’t wait too long. “We’re working right now to update our LED rebate offerings to match the types of ag installations we’re seeing in the field,” says Warrington.

For more information, download the fact sheet “Indoor lighting for livestock, poultry and farm shop facilities” (PM 2089R) at farmenergy.exnet.iastate.edu, or follow @ISU_Farm_Energy on Twitter.

Petersen is program coordinator for ISU Farm Energy in collaboration with the Iowa Energy Center.

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