

Video conferencing helping farmers

By Dan Shortridge
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GEORGETOWN — Scientists and chicken farmers are teaming up to fight poultry diseases with new technology at the University of Delaware's Lasher Laboratory.

Advanced video equipment installed this fall lets scientists handle diseased chickens in a sealed laboratory while cameramen record the activity from a nearby room, said technology specialist Dean Dey.

Scientists can use the special cameras to zoom in on specimens and get immediate feedback from the people who work most closely with the chickens.

Another advance to the new technology, Dey said, is farmers no longer worry about being exposed to the diseases in the lab, then carrying them back to their flocks.

"They're very pleased," Dey said. "It takes a little while to get used to, but after about an hour it feels like you're really part of the other classroom."

The poultry project is just one of the ways officials at UD's extension program are using the technology, installed in August after Dr. Hiram Lasher and the Sussex County Council gave \$90,00 in donations.

Lasher Laboratory — east of Sussex Tech High School on Route 9 — is linked to the university's main campus via fiber optic cables. That means scientists can meet without having to travel an hour and a half each way.

"I think it's really the way a lot of things will go in terms of trying to stay connected with the university," Dey said. "People are having meetings now that they would have avoided in the past."

Students in the programs also have used the equipment to hold joint classes with Newark instructors, and vice-versa.

Lab officials also plan to use the equipment at Delaware Technical and Community College's Owens campus. They're planning to broadcast some of their poultry sessions to the 24 other Delaware sites that use the video systems, Dey said.