

Heather Lewis

Mount Joy, PA

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Good morning, I'm Heather Lewis. My husband Mike and I farm in Mount Joy. We raise broiler chickens as well as a crop rotation of corn, beans, and wheat. I was asked to describe what inflation looks like in our operation. I think the best way would be to think of a ratchet strap. As we look at our inputs to our crop, we are seeing an increase of 25 percent. And in talking with our suppliers for those inputs, they are expecting at least another 5 percent going into next year's crop. Therefore, we tighten the strap.

As a contract grower, we pay the propane, electric and all the maintenance of our chicken houses. Averaging all those normal everyday costs, we are looking at roughly a 14% and greater increase in our normal expenses but that's not even considering any additional upgrades or expansions. Our newest chicken house is only 7 years old. If we were going to go and build that same house again today to expand our operation, it would cost us 60% more. That's not going to happen. Every year at Christmas I ask for a system in our chicken houses that would totally make our job easier, more efficient and save on our backs. 2 weeks ago, we were able to take a day and visit Ag Progress Days. While talking with the company who built our chicken houses and does most of our upgrades, we talked about my hopes and dreams for our buildings. The cost for that system 2 years ago was roughly \$9,000. It was enough that we couldn't justify spending that much money for something we can just keep working at. Today that same system would be about \$11,000. Yep. You guessed it. Having a hard time seeing how that would pay for itself. Another click on the ratchet strap; we won't be getting that system anytime in the foreseeable future.

As farmers, yes. We have had some good years with some beautiful crops and good prices. That has helped with some of these additional expenses that I've mentioned before. But also, with farming comes great uncertainty. Weather conditions have not been favorable for us. Yes, much better than some places in the country but at least on our farm, it isn't looking like we will have crops like we've had in recent years. So, when we factor everything together, the ratchet strap gets another click.

You are hearing pieces of conversations that we have often at the kitchen table. We are first generation farmers here in Lancaster County. Mike coming from a dairy farming family in NY and me coming from a small town in rural Ohio. We want our kids to be able to continue and grow this lifestyle if they desire, so we talk about it openly and frequently. They need to know that tightening things now will hopefully bring opportunities later. It's a tricky thing with inflation. You have that unknown feeling about the future. Yes. The country will always need people willing to raise our food, fuel and fiber. But will we always be able to stay ahead of the risk? Our kids raise pigs for 4H and FFA. It's cool as a family to say that we are grocery store farmers as well as direct to consumer farmers. It's been a hard year watching them raise these pigs and deal with losses physically as well as financially. I'm glad that they are here, learning these lessons now, and getting ready for future opportunities. I'm not a very good

“doom and gloom person”. Yes. Ratchet straps can get tight and uncomfortable, but they provide safety and security. So, things are tight right now but we’ve gone through hard before and come out stronger than before. We will do it again.