

# Teaching or preaching?

By Ron Meijerhof

All incubator manufacturers in our industry provide their customers with very detailed, high quality management guides and guide lines for the correct use of their machines. These guides will not only explain how the machines work, what maintenance practices should be executed, which problems can occur and how they should be solved in the correct way, but they will also give guidelines for settings on temperature, ventilation, relative humidity etc. This is very positive and very important, and the incubator manufacturers are really doing a good job there. But how should we put these excellent recommendations into practice? Are they rules that are carved in stone, which cannot be changed but should be followed in all detail? Or should they be taken more as guidelines that indicate a starting point, a base line that will result in acceptable results but that need optimization by each individual hatchery based on their own experiences? And once the hatchery has found their own optimal or acceptable guideline, should those be carved in stone from there on, to not be changed anymore?

I think that if we ask the questions to the incubation manufacturers, all of them will answer that their guidelines are indications that need to be adjusted to the local situation. They will probably answer that the guides are not intended to be followed to the last letter, but that they should be used as a starting point, an outline of the way things work and settings should be made, that can be used as a base line for further development. Not because otherwise the responsibility for the results could be placed on them, but because hatcheries, sets, breeds, conditions can vary, and each situation needs its own adjusted settings for optimal results. A car manufacturer will not tell us precisely how to drive our new car, but will give general guidelines for practical usage, and over the years we develop our own personal way that suits us best, under our conditions.

While visiting different hatcheries we can sometimes notice that guidelines given by the manufacturers or developed years ago through previous experiences are followed almost as a holy book. And as a large amount of the attention of a hatchery manager needs to go to the daily operational problems, this is actually quite logical. The first priority of the everyday life in a hatchery is to keep the process running. We often like to think that the job of a hatchery manager is to think about chick quality, optimizing machine settings, experimenting with adjustments and changes and all these things. And yes, it is an important part of the job. Perhaps the most important part, but not necessarily the first priority. The first priority is much more down to earth: get the eggs in time, have the people required for pulling the hatch, organize the logistics of chick transport, keep the machinery working, do the preventive maintenance etc. And as incubation is a continuous process that needs to be repeated in a uniform way over and over again, often only limited changes will be done over time, unless an obvious problem shows up.

So as long as there are no major difference between the performance parameters at this moment and half a year or a year ago, there is no major need for a change, and the setting parameters and the recommendations that worked well in the past have sometimes a tendency to become more and more like a holy bible. But experience learns that we do sometimes need adjustments, we need to be critical on what we are doing, and we need to keep trying to see if other settings or other methods might work better in a specific situation.

We do not want to turn our hatcheries in experimental research farms. But at the same time we want to encourage people to use their knowledge, experience and common sense to try to improve, not only improve the hatching results or chick quality, but also their knowledge and understanding. Because also incubation is a process of continuous adaptation and changing. And only if we are willing to test the boundaries of our knowledge and understanding, we will be able to adapt and optimize our results. Because not only management guides and guide lines are not holy bibles that are carved in stone, also our knowledge and understanding needs continuous adjustment, development and teaching.