Agrichick's move to single stage incubation yields dividends

International Hatchery Practice recently visited AviAfrica and before the show they took the opportunity to visit the Avichick Hatchery, which is a couple of hours' drive from Johannesburg.

Avichick specialise in the production of day old and point of lay table egg layers of the Lohmann Brown and Silver strains.

Originally, the operation was part of Golden Lay and about 10 years ago became the subject of a management buyout.

Four years ago they disposed of the commercial egg layers to Nulaid, leaving the specialist breeding and hatching operation that the company is today.

The Emka setters and, inset, the control panel.

Move to single stage machines

Avichick operate one breeder rearing farm and two breeder laying farms – all of 40,000 or so capacity. Currently, 30% of production is Lohmann Brown and 70% is Lohmann Silver.

The original hatchery, located approximately 1300m above sea level, was built in 1984 and was recently converted from Chick Master multi-stage machines to Emka single stage ones.

Egg storage at the hatchery is limited and so after eggs are collected they are stored on farm and go to the hatchery when they are required for setting. Prior to setting, eggs are pre-heated at 24°C for 7-14 hours.

Avichick chose Emka VH1152S setters of which they have nine – one setter room contains four machines and the other contains five. These are complemented by VH384H hatchers from the same company. At transfer the eggs from one setter fills three hatchers.

Avichick decided to go to single stage incubation in order to improve hatchery performance and so they could also upgrade hygiene and biosecurity.

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Left, the Emka hatchers and, right, the end result – quality chicks.

Left, grading of chicks and, right, cheap coal is used as an energy saving.

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When it came to machine choice the Emka machines stood out because they were very easy to work with, easy to clean and the associated computerised controls were simple and easy for management and staff to work with. These controls focus on the management of five key functions – temperature, relative humidity, carbon dioxide, turning and cooling.

First class support

In the early days after the machines were installed there were teething problems but these were linked to the altitude of the hatchery, the air handling during the transition stage and some Aspergillus activity.

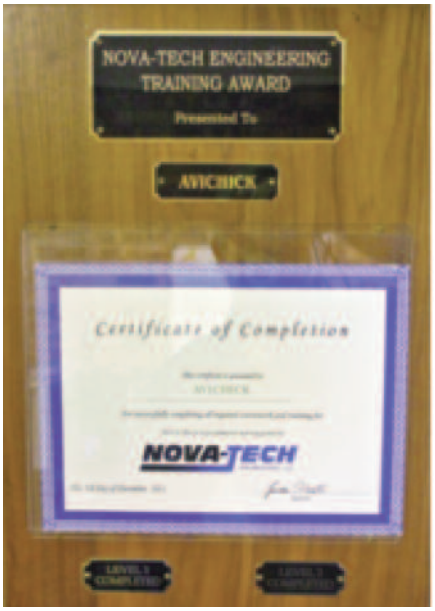
However, Avichick received good support from Emka's people both locally and back in Belgium and the problems were soon rectified. Since then, support from Emka has been first class!

Currently the hatchery produces 36 first grade pullet chicks per 100 eggs set and is performing better as a single stage operation than it did as a multi-stage one.

The water in the region has a high calcium content and so all water used in sensitive roles in the hatchery first passes through on-site water softeners.

At pulling all chicks are subjected to grading and then processed through a Novatech debeaker and vaccinator before a final quality check.

Hatchery waste and culled hens are disposed of in a novel way – they go to a local crocodile farm! ■



The Novatech system is popular and proof of staff training is shown above right. Below, right, African art reflecting eggs, embryos and automation.