

Dear Animal Health Australia,

As a family we have been egg farming since 1966 and were part of the transition of the egg laying industry's move from floor laying hens to caged production. It was a time of regulation and discipline to produce a high quality protein source food for Australian consumers that was safer and more cost efficient for the consumers. The farmers' recognition of the health /welfare benefits to the animals using cages for production and the food safety aspects of cages was then at the time a revelation .

25 years ago I told my egg farming father I am going to go into free range production as there is a small consumer demand that needs to be met. His response was expected, you are a bloody idiot. It's been tough many large losses as we learnt to manage as best we can in this unpredictable discipline .The risks remain high with the stock outside and therefore very little Bio-security in adult flocks and constant threat of disease due to contact with their own faeces.

The move away from cages.

Along the way the industry has continued to meet both consumer demand for all types of eggs production and the whims of the 2 Big Retailers retailers in their quest to maximise profits at the expense of the consumers. The move toward free range is driven by the customer not the consumer.

The changes to the type of egg production come at great cost and risk to the farmer ,however we farm on as we are committed to our stock, farming and the quality of the product we produce day in day out 7 days a week. If we don't look after our stock they won't produce the product. If we don't produce the product ,someone somewhere else in the country will do so. Our the shelf space /Brand for our product will be lost as will local employment .

Welfare .

Clearly welfare is important from both the aspects of productivity and profitability ,but we care that our stock have the best conditions , at all times.

We are committed to the health of the stock regardless of the type of production. We are committed to our production systems, quality assurance programs that deliver in all aspects production ,welfare and product safety.

The environmental conditions in cage facilities are the best, better ventilation ,cleaner watering system and supply and cleaner feeding systems.

The animal welfare outcomes in terms of mortality in non- caged production are at best 2 to 3 times the losses of caged hens.

The requirement for medication of hens due to bacterial infection in Avairy ,free range and barn is ongoing .In cages this century its rare.

Sure ,hens in cage don't get to dust bathe, but the main reason to dust bathe is to help rid the external parasites. You rarely see these in cages.

Whilst on parasites ,the hens don't need to be wormed on a regular basis as they do when they are on the ground as they don't get worms in cages.

Again ,the Northern mite and red mite that has plagued European community's push to cage free egg production is a rarity in cages.

The bacterial disease of Spotty Liver that is running through a large percentage of free range and barn flocks all over Australia is not seen in cages .

The list goes on and on. Above are some of the reason all those years ago that the transition was made from the floor to the cage.

Cage hens do not have access to their own faeces ,minimising the spread of disease.
Cage hens don't crush. A significant % of the high mortality rates in barn and free range is crushing.
Figures of 1 -2 % of a flock in 24 hours is not uncommon.

Weak bones, Yes relative to Barn or Free Range the research would suggest that bone density is heavier. As it should be :”the hens in these systems are have to get around inside in tiered structures ,outside in the ranges and perch at night time “Cage hens are placed once and removed once ,In my experience in the supervision of Euthanising Millions of hens over the years personally there are negligible levels of broken legs in extraction of the hens from the cages during the procedure.

40 to 50 years ago we used to see cage layer fatigue due to the weight of the hens and poor nutritional standards. In today's cage production we do not see cage layer fatigue suggesting that bone density is sufficiently managed to get hens through their laying life. So I think we can dismiss this claim along with the hens forget how to walk ,when they have been in a cage. Animal activist nonsense.

There has been some research to suggest that stress levels(as measured by the hormones associated with stress) in cages are lower than those in non- cage production systems. Competition in these systems is greater due to accessibility of hens to greater numbers than in a cage.

Cage hens cant stretch their wings .That's a hard one not say yes...they can't in a cage.

Welfare outcomes don't just happen. As farmers we have a code of practice for all types of production. We have maintained these standards as an Industry, but with continued market pressures on all producers ,some may be tempted to lower their standards. The long term survival of the future of the industry is probably not best served now or in the future with a voluntary code .We know that the community wants faith the standards for animal welfare which would be most easily achieved by mandatory standards.

The community is currently voting that they still have a preference for cage eggs. The High-jacking of a State Agricultural minister ,by supposed groups looking after Animal Welfare /rights doesn't represent the wider Community's clear choice. Many community members don't have the fiscal resources to purchase more expensive free range of barn eggs. The suggestion of phasing out or banning the use of cages will be denying the community access to this cheap source of protein. Something only affluent country's like Australia would consider. Have a look at the worlds production of cage eggs as a percentage of all eggs produced in the world for some perspective on this tunnel vision some have for the future of egg farming.

The images of shown on headline grabbing articles produced by Journalists and Animal Activist groups who actively trespass do not reflect my experience in cage egg production. The RSPCA rarely uses any science in their emotive argument that cage farming is cruel. The RSPCA forefathers would be dismissive at the stance of the current organisation .As farmers we think the RSPCA has a role in the general community to ensure the general public who are not professional in the field of animal caring or welfare to look after their animals. I think that is where there charter should end as should the extent of their

tax payers funding. They have become a commercial entity for fiscal reward .Very difficult to be the umpire ,policeman and the treasurer.

I hope the stock standard public submission from the general public or those rounded up by the animal activists are seen for what they are. Emotive argument written by the general public that have never been to an Egg Farm.

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