

SUBMISSION TO ANIMAL HEALTH AUSTRALIA

21 February 2018

Dear Animal Health Australia

RE: SUBMISSION – ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS PUBLIC CONSULTATION

About us

My name is Barry Burges I come from a 7th generation farming Family that has been raising animals for a long time, I, in my own business enterprise, have been a sheep farmer since 1969 and an egg farmer since 1992. We currently have about 30 000 cage chickens and 40 000 free range. That means we have about 42 percent of our mix as cage eggs and produce about 60 000 eggs a day.

We, as a family company all recognise the importance of animal welfare and do the best we can to provide our animals the very best in nutrition and housing. This is important for two reasons,

- 1) A purely economic consideration, happy chickens produce more.
- 2) We truly love our animals.

We realise that some people get very emotive on animal welfare issues, but as in most subjects, it is a long way from a black and white issue, it is a very complex situation with many factors to take into account.

Why do we support cage eggs?

Besides the animal welfare issues, one of the main reasons is that 50 percent of Australians choose to buy cage eggs, to deny people a choice will place economic restrictions on business's and families.

In regard to animal welfare, caged chickens,

- have the lowest mortality rate
- have the lowest incidence of disease
- have the lowest rate of cannibalism
- require fewer vaccinations
- do not need antibiotics
- enjoy a climate-controlled environment year-round
- are not at risk of predation
- lay the cleanest eggs, with greatly reduced or no risk of salmonella

We chose to farm cage eggs for many reasons, and animal health and welfare outcomes are at the top of the list. Of the three production methods cage hens:

In my opinion these benefits are more important than the hens having a need to dust bathe or perch outside.

As well as the health and welfare benefits, cage farming systems offer the most predictable supply of eggs, have the lowest carbon footprint and don't require us to access vast tracts of land which are hard to find and subject to significant zoning, environmental and land use requirements and red tape.

Don't stop cage egg production

I'm well aware of the calls from the activists and even an Agriculture Minister to 'ban' cages. For mine, there are five main reasons why this should not happen:

1. The hens are better off – if you don't believe me, speak to any reputable veterinarian.
2. Customer choice – why shouldn't the public be able to buy the eggs they want? If they want cage eggs – and they do – we should be able to provide them just as we have been since.
3. Cost of living – cage eggs are the most affordable. Seventy per cent of all cage eggs are bought by people who earn less than the average Australian income, so why shouldn't they be able to feed their families with affordable, protein-rich and healthy eggs?
4. Investment to date – our industry has invested almost \$500 million in the last 10 years to improve significantly our cage systems. For my farm alone it cost \$1.5 million, on the understanding that the legislation would not change for 20 years. We now have modern European cages that are best industry practice but we are still paying it off.
5. Business survival – banning cages will send me and many other farmers like me to the wall. We simply cannot stop what we're doing and start again with a different production system.

We support the Standards and Guidelines

As an industry we have shown that we are responsive to customer needs and changes in practice to achieve better animal welfare outcomes.

I think the Standards and Guidelines will help us continue to improve and help 'weed out' any rogue operators that don't do the right thing and tarnish the image of our industry.

As such, I support Option C.

One thing that has become clear to me over the last few months during this process is that the misconceptions and misperceptions about the egg farming industry are persisting. And that's largely in part because of the vocal activist groups. I'm certain that thousands of people will sign online forms or standard submissions calling for a ban on cages, influenced by emotive language and decades-old photos and film of cage systems that are no longer used or even longer exist. But I'm also certain that less than five per cent will have been to an egg farm and seen what it's *really* like. I believe that if they did there would be a far more balanced view.

I know that our industry has not done enough to tell our story and we need to do something about it. I think implementation of Option C of the Standards and Guidelines gives us an excellent opportunity to do more to educate the egg eating consumers about egg farming so they can feel OK about buying eggs from whichever production system they choose.

Barry Burges

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