



MOORABOOL VALLEY EGGS

— PTY LTD —

SUBMISSION TO ANIMAL HEALTH AUSTRALIA

22 February 2018

Dear Animal Health Australia

RE: SUBMISSION – ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS PUBLIC CONSULTATION

In recent years there has been people external to the Egg Laying Industry who have voiced their opinions about what they think we as egg farmers do and what they think we should do in the future. Unfortunately in a lot of cases their opinions were/are not based on the real facts of egg farming and in most cases they have been ill informed.

I'd like to share with you a little about our business and what we *actually* do and why.

About me

My name is Simon Colla and I'm a third generation egg farmer from Meredith Victoria. My family has been farming eggs for 62 years.

We currently have 340,000 hens and farm *cage and free range* eggs. We produce about 225,000 eggs a day or 82,000,000 eggs per annum. Of our total on farm egg production, 95% is cage eggs and 5% free range eggs.

Animal welfare matters to me and Moorabool Valley Eggs

Animal welfare is very important to me, my family and our employees. I care about my hens and I recognise and accept my responsibility to look after their health and welfare and adopt best practice to do so. Farming is hard enough; if I didn't love my animals I wouldn't do it and wouldn't have persevered in the industry as long as I have.

That's why it's particularly difficult and hurtful to hear activists and other uninformed people talk about us and our farming methods, inferring that we are cruel, heartless people. We' are certainly are not any of these things and find their comments very offensive.

As well as valuing the hens as living creatures, their health and welfare are important for economic reasons - healthy hens' lay healthy eggs. A safe environment, good feed, plenty of water and strict biosecurity measures are some of the ways we ensure the health and welfare of our hens and sustainable productivity.

Why cage eggs

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

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- 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.

In my opinion these benefits are more important than the hens having a need to dust bathe or perch outside. In addition hens housed in cages also significantly reduces the risk of disease being transferred to humans and local wildlife.

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. It also so the lowest cost form of production which supports a great percentage of consumers in Australia.

Finally, my customers like my eggs. They want cage eggs. Yes, demand for free range eggs may be increasing but there is still a significant demand for cage eggs and like any business we give the customers what they want.

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 – seek out a reputable veterinarian and ask for their opinion.
2. Customer choice – why shouldn't the public be able to buy the eggs they want? If they want cage eggs – **and sales of cage eggs say they do** – we should be able to provide them just as we have been since 1955.
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 \$3 million. We now have modern European cages that are best practice but we are still paying it off.
5. Business survival – banning cages will most likely send me and many other farmers like me out of business. We simply cannot stop what we're doing and start again with a different production system.
6. Moorabool Valley Eggs employees 50 plus locals and banning cages would also see the loss of many of these jobs and worse still all of these jobs if we could not survive.

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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.

Yours Sincerely

Simon Colla

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