

SUBMISSION TO ANIMAL HEALTH AUSTRALIA

22 February 2018

Dear Animal Health Australia

RE: SUBMISSION – ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS PUBLIC CONSULTATION

There's a lot of talk by a lot of people about what they *think* we do and what they think we should do.

I'd like to share with you what we *actually* do and why.

About me

My name is Tony Libreri and I'm a second generation egg farmer from Greta NSW . We've been farming eggs for over 40 years.

We have 180000 hens and farm Cage & Free Range eggs. We produce about 115000 cage eggs a day and 24000 Free range eggs per day.

Animal welfare matters to me

Animal welfare is very important to me. 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.

That's why it's particularly difficult to hear activists and other uninformed people talk about us and what we do like we're cruel, heartless people. We're not.

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:

- 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.

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.

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 – 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 1974.
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 7 million. We now have modern European cages that are best 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.

Tony Libreri