

Media Release

New definition of free range

10 June 2015

Egg Farmers of Australia has endorsed a new definition of free range egg production that will help build consumer confidence and provide certainty for egg farmers.

The new definition, that covers a range of points relating to the management of free range egg farms, was presented to the NSW Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation, Victor Dominello in a constructive meeting in Sydney this morning.

Egg Farmers of Australia spokesman, John Coward, said he was hopeful that Minister Dominello will take that definition to a meeting of Ministers for Consumer Affairs/Fair Trading in Melbourne on Friday. That meeting will aim to find ways to improve egg labelling in Australia.

"Egg Farmers of Australia believes it is imperative consumers get what they are paying for when it comes to egg purchasing," Mr Coward said.

"There has been some confusion regarding the current definition of free range in the Model Code of Practice for Domestic Poultry – 4th Edition (<http://www.publish.csiro.au/pid/3451.htm>) but the new definition agreed to by the majority of the egg industry yesterday, after considerable consultation with all State representative bodies, will aim to improve consumer confidence and egg farmer certainty," he said.

The new definition is: 'Laying hens in free range farming systems are unconfined within a ventilated hen house. They have access to and are free to roam and forage on an outdoor range area during daylight hours in a managed environment.'

Mr Coward said the definition (which is pasted below) contained a number of minimum farm management standards to be met including "outdoor stocking density must not exceed 1 hen per square metre. Where hens are stocked at higher than 1500 hens per hectare, close management must be undertaken and regular rotation of hens onto fresh outdoor range areas should occur with some continuing soil or fodder cover."

"The egg industry is pleased the Minister will consider progressing such a constructive view of the issue to a national approach to egg labelling. We hope others involved in this debate, such as Choice, will take a constructive and responsible approach on this issue. All we have heard from Choice recently are cheap shots from the sideline that highlight their lack of accountability," he said.

For media enquiries, please call (02) 9409 6909.

Free-range systems

Definition

"Laying hens in free range farming systems are unconfined within a ventilated hen house. They have access to and are free to roam and forage on an outdoor range area during daylight hours in a managed environment."

Minimum Standards:

1. Hen housing should:
 - a. provide shelter from inclement weather;
 - b. provide protection from predators;
 - c. be ventilated; and
 - d. contain access to food and water.
2. Hens should be provided with a minimum of 6 hours of darkness per night.
3. Eggs must not be labelled as free range until such time that the flock is provided with unrestricted daily access onto the outdoor range area.
4. Popholes (openings) should be provided extending along the length of the hen house equating to 2 metres per 1000 hens (min size 35cm high/40cm wide).
5. The outdoor range area should provide:
 - a. vegetation;
 - b. shelter;
 - c. shade; and
 - d. reasonable protection from predators.
6. Access to an outdoor range should be unrestricted and be for a minimum of 8 hours per day during summer daylight hours and a minimum of 6 hours per day during winter daylight hours.
7. Outdoor stocking density must not exceed 1 hen per square metre. Where hens are stocked at higher than 1500 hens per hectare, close management must be undertaken and regular rotation of hens onto fresh outdoor range areas should occur with some continuing soil or fodder cover.
8. Stocking density inside the hen house up to a maximum of 30kg per square metre of useable space.