



HOW SOUTH AUSTRALIA CRACKED THE EGG INDUSTRY



THE FESTIVAL STATE CELEBRATES STRONG EGG GROWTH

It's been billed as the festival state, the wine state and branded by many other ever-changing slogans.

But one thing that hasn't changed for South Australia over the past 70 years is the strong growth of egg production.

Eggs are the most affordable source of protein for Australian families - and since its fledgling days in the 1950's until now - egg farming has been an important part of the state's food sector.

1950's

The 1950s saw the development of small egg farms consisting 100 to 1000 birds, in deep litter. The family farms developed during this era were mainly to supplement other farming income.

1960's

During this decade, South Australia began to see the emergence of larger farms

stocking up to 500 to 5000 birds. The S.A Egg Board insisted that farmers used cages, which were made mandatory to prevent disease. Due to disease risks, farmers were forced to get their birds off the ground.



Image: SA Egg Board archives/SA Records

This saw the proliferation of the battery cage system of egg production well into the 1970s. (It should be noted that this antiquated battery system is no longer used in Australian egg production).

1970's

As egg farming grew in the 1970's, state based regulation quota systems were introduced on egg farms. By then, the average farm size housed between 5000 and 50,000 hens in upgraded hi-tech, and much improved, caged systems.

The new farming method consisted of high-rise sheds equipped with automated feeders, deep drop litter systems and auto egg-collection machinery.

The farms began paying attention to hen comfort and air quality with the introduction of crude shed insulation and controlled evaporative cooling systems.

In this decade South Australia's egg farming included families like the Humphrys, Tschärke, Munzberg, Starrick, Bressington, Humzy, Johnson, Jakka, Boyd, Letton, Aldridge, McIntosh, Harvey and many more family farm operations.

1980's

By now, with an increased demand for eggs, even larger farming enterprises began to emerge, carrying 20,000 to 50,000 birds in regulated cage systems. Quotas at the time were valued at over \$30.00 per bird.

1990's

In this era, de-regulation of the egg industry was introduced progressively in all Australian states. In South Australia, the average farm size became 50,000 hens and the value of quotas was completely eroded.

Familiar egg companies included: Morning Gold, Golden Eggs, Days Adelaide Egg Supply, Solar Eggs, Copeland, Leaney and Letton Eggs.

It's during this decade that free-range eggs began to emerge and be marketed.

This saw the emergence of more family farms that established commercial free range egg production. Some of the family names associated with the development of free range farming include the Fryars, Rohde, Andary and many more.

2000's

By the early 2000's, Federal and state Agriculture Ministers in Australia introduced national legislation to ban the use of old cage production systems or battery farming.

By 2008, a new, more humane cage space became mandatory.

All egg farms were forced to renew all of their old cage systems to meet the new density requirements.

It was at this time that caged egg production in South Australia fell into demise, and free-range eggs emerged as a premium

market.

2010-2020

This decade saw many changes due to consumer-driven demands.

The year of 2012 saw a significant push by supermarkets and egg retailers to move towards non-caged eggs.

This coincided with a rise in negative animal activism against the egg industry.

More egg producers began to capitalise on the back of high prices for free range eggs.

By 2015 there were major regulatory changes within the growing free-range sector.

Due to pressure from retailers, the free-range egg industry pushed for a limit of 10,000 birds per hectare in a bid to meet consumer demands, who were concerned about the way the eggs on their breakfast table were being produced.

However, there was some internal contention amongst egg producers - with some advocating for a limit of only 1,500 birds per hectare, while others supported the higher limit 10,000 birds per hectare.

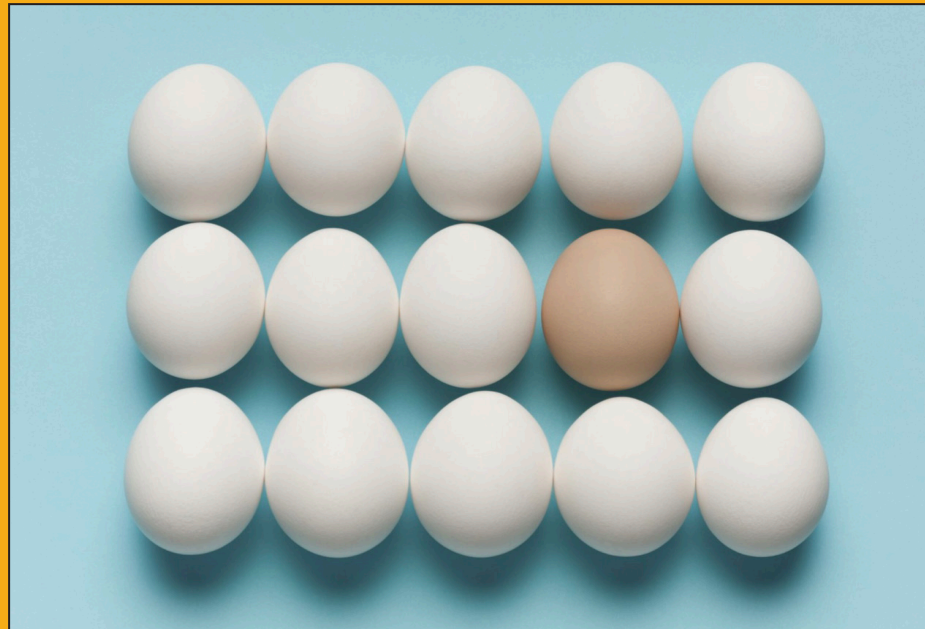


Image: Adobe Stock

During this period, increased food safety regulations were also applied to the egg industry.

This saw the introduction of accreditation processes for high food safety and animal welfare compliance for farmers. This demand was led by Australian Egg Standards, various governments and retailers.

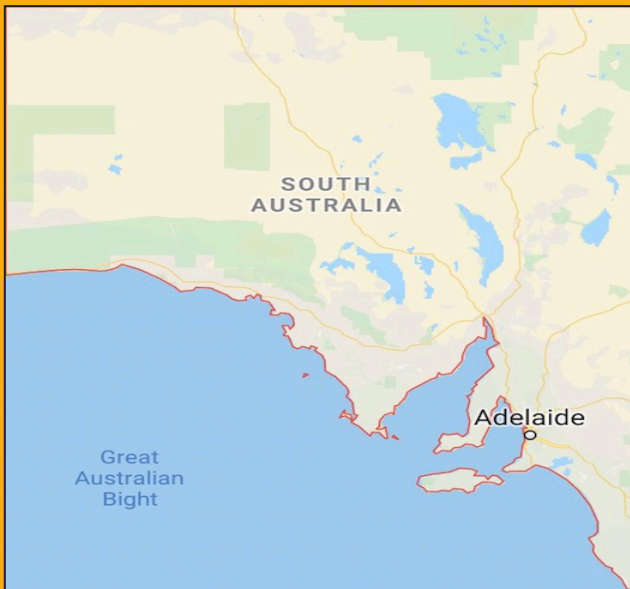


Image: Google Maps

In 2017, national labelling legislation was passed to legitimise the concept of 10,000 birds per hectare for any free-range production operation.

This prompted the growth in so-called caravan egg production - a system where hens spend time in open fields where 'mobile housing' is placed for extra safety, housing and egg laying.

During 2017, 'pastured eggs', as they are known, became the new premium 'free range' egg product.

There was also a major push by retailers for farmers to set a date where the industry would see the exit of caged egg production.

By 2018, the RSPCA and retailers began driving a public campaign to ban caged egg production.

The egg industry estimates that it will cost the industry \$1.5 billion dollars to meet this expectation. It is feared that such a move would leave farmers with 'stranded assets' in the form of caged facilities, as caged production is a long-term investment and involves long-term banking loans.

The egg sector believes that new animal welfare standards and guidelines are long overdue for the country's egg sector. But

the egg industry continues to support caged egg production, despite the threat (driven by activists and supermarket's) to ban cages.

In 2019 drought ravaged Australia and egg production dropped due to high cost of production and low returns for eggs.



Image: C. Lawson

In 2020 a serious epidemic known as Covid-19 swept the world. It had a vast impact on humans in all Australian states - effecting cross border trade and travel bans.

Ironically, despite the SA state border being periodically closed, enforced home stays due to the deadly nature of the virus led to more people taking up home baking. This in turn led to a rise in the demand and consumption of eggs.