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EGG FARMERS WANT TO HELP EDUCATE ‘BACKYARD CHOOKIES’ ABOUT DISEASE RISK

- **Commercial egg farmers set to help educate backyard chook owners about disease risks**
- **Cardboard egg cartons can only be used once under biosecurity rules**
- **Farmers to launch backyard education under new strategic plan released today**

Australia’s egg farmers want to help educate backyard chook owners about the huge risks that they can pose to the nation’s commercial egg industry.

Egg Farmers of Australia (EFA) CEO Melinda Hashimoto warned that people with backyard chooks were often unaware of their legal responsibilities when it comes to the spread of poultry disease.

“In the past few years we have seen poultry diseases such as Salmonella Enteritidis (SE) and Avian Influenza (A.I) affect the commercial egg sector, forcing farms to quarantine, or in the case of A.I having their entire flocks destroyed,” she said.

Mrs Hashimoto said one key biosecurity risk was the practice of reusing old egg cartons to exchange backyard eggs with neighbours, family and friends.

“Many backyard chook owners give-away their eggs in second hand cartons originally obtained from egg purchases at supermarkets, which contain commercial branding.

“It’s in fact illegal in most states to use an egg carton more than once. This is because disease microbes can be relayed from eggs to the carton. So, by recycling another company’s carton, backyard chook owners run the risk of actually spreading disease around their region.”

To combat the issue, Egg Farmers of Australia will provide resources to backyard chook owners to encourage them to learn more about the egg industry, in a bid to better educate them on the ‘do’s and don’t’s’ of hen management and food safety.

The education strategy forms part the organisation’s five-year strategic plan, launched today.

Mrs Hashimoto said the strategic plan outlines core work that Egg Farmers of Australia would focus on in the coming years including biosecurity, food safety, research and government regulations.

“Our strategic plan provides EFA with focus and direction over the next five years,” she said.

Australia’s commercial farmers produce 17.9 million eggs daily - equating to 6.3 billion eggs a year.

“It is a small, yet very important food industry for the nation, so we have to protect it from disease risk. Many families keep chooks and we’re not demonising them for that. We’re about making them aware that they play an important role in the biosecurity of the nation’s entire egg industry,” the CEO said.

Under the strategic plan, Egg Farmers of Australia has produced a fact sheet that highlights the steps that backyard chook owners should abide by to help reduce outbreaks of poultry disease.

“Without the help of backyard chook owners being diligent, Australia’s entire commercial domestic egg industry could be placed at risk in any state or territory,” Mrs Hashimoto said.

For a copy of the fact sheet visit www.eggfarmersaustralia.org **Photo:** EFA CEO Melinda Hashimoto

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