

15 September 2024

EGG FARMERS CALL FOR NATIONAL ACTION ON DISEASE THREAT

Australia's commercial egg farmers have called on governments across the nation to take national action to register all poultry in the wake of devastating disease outbreaks that disrupted egg supplies.

Egg Farmers of Australia want a National Poultry Register set-up with state and federal backing to ensure people raising laying hens register their flock.

This would include backyard chooks, ducks and other poultry where homeowners would be required to register the location of their chicken coops and the number of poultry on their property.

Egg Farmers of Australia CEO Melinda Hashimoto said a central register would allow authorities to know exactly how many backyard and commercial sites existed in areas where cases of Avian Influenza or Salmonella Enteritidis occurred.

"Egg Farmers of Australia has called on governments around the nation to pull together to invoke a national register of poultry in light of devastating outbreaks of Avian Influenza in some parts of Australia this year," Ms Hashimoto said.

"Such a register would allow disease management to be improved and poultry owners, including those with backyard chooks, would be able to receive the same alerts as commercial farms detailing what they can and can't do, when disease occurs in their local area."

The call follows recent disease outbreaks across several states and territories earlier this year that impacted on over 1.5 million layer hens.

High Pathogen Avian Influenza (HPAI) disease infected backyard chooks, commercial cage, barn and free-range eggs farms as well duck and chicken meat farms in Victoria, NSW and the ACT. During the containment phase, major supermarkets were forced to restrict the number of free-range eggs sold to customers.

Ms Hashimoto said the consideration of a register, following the largest Avian Influenza event in the nation, was important all Australian food production and retail sectors.

"A national register for all poultry is vital for the egg industry as it will help identify the entire number of hens and other poultry in an impact zone," Ms Hashimoto said.

"Such a register will make the communication and management of a disease easier for authorities. It will also reduce the burden to egg and poultry farmers, governments and taxpayers by allowing for a more rapid response to all poultry owners - whether commercial or backyard.

"It will also allow the general public, in particular backyard poultry owners, to better understand how the risk of wild birds impact the health of their poultry."

Ms Hashimoto said backyard chook, duck and poultry owners did not always appreciate the high cost of disease outbreaks to commercial egg farmers – both economically and emotionally.

"Full control of disease issues will allow commercial egg farmers to continue to work hard to bring to Australian consumers a low-cost affordable protein that is found on breakfast, lunch and dinner plates," she said.

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