



EGG PRODUCERS FEDERATION of New Zealand (Inc)

Draft Code of Animal Welfare for Layer Hens Background Questions and Answers

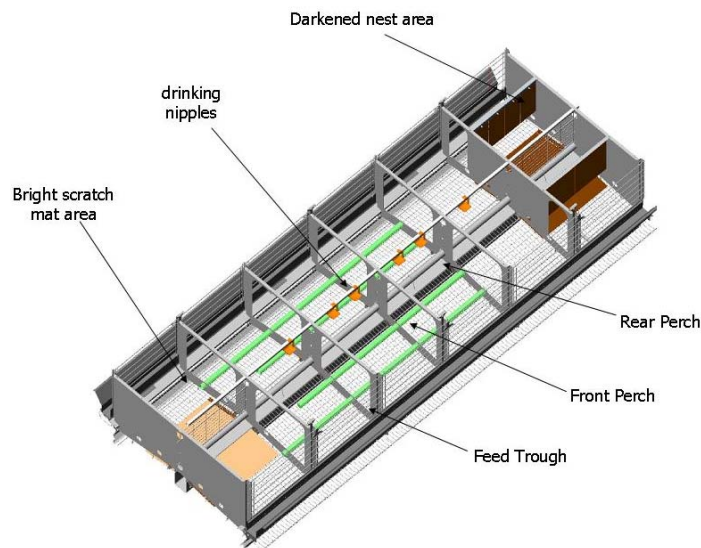
February 2011

Colony Systems

What is a colony system?

A colony system is an enclosure which is significantly larger than a conventional cage. The additional space is “furnished” with perches, laying and scratching areas and is sufficiently large for birds to move between these locations, stand erect and spread their wings.

They are housed in large sheds and built in tiers which means they can take advantage of modern techniques of automatic manure disposal and egg collection, both of which contribute to high standards of hygiene and bird health. Below is a schematic diagram of a typical colony system:



Where did the idea for colonies come from?

Colonies, which are the result of many years of behavioural studies have been widely introduced across the EU , principally Western Europe over the last 2-3 years. The result balances welfare with the continuous supply of affordable eggs.

Nearly three years ago a model colony shed with 45,000 birds was established near Dunedin to test the system under New Zealand conditions. This was part of a

NZ\$1,000,000 research project part-funded by the EPF and the Sustainable Farming Fund.

Through this project, the system has been subject to rigorous investigation by the New Zealand industry and MAF in association with Bristol University in the UK which is a leader in the study of the care and welfare of poultry. The results of the trial are very encouraging.

What about free-range and barn systems?

If introduced, colony systems would replace the conventional cages.

Free-range and barn production systems would remain largely unchanged.

That said, the proposed introduction of colonies is part of a revised Code of Animal Welfare for Layer Hens which addresses other aspects of the care of all birds specifying such matters as stocking density and requirements for all production systems.

Egg Consumption Trends in New Zealand

Is there a trend towards free-range?

The majority of eggs consumed in New Zealand are from conventional caged hens (88%) with free range eggs accounting for 10.6% and barn 1.4%.

Our best measurement of consumption comes from supermarket data. In the last ten years, free range as a percentage of supermarket sales has increased by approximately one percent a year, while cage has decreased by one percent per year. However, in terms of overall volume, the cage egg sales volume increase was double that of free range egg sales volume in supermarkets in the same time period.

How has egg production evolved over the years?

The traditional battery cages were introduced in the 1950s, largely by Dutch immigrants from their European experience. These systems, by raising birds off the ground, substantially improved hygiene and reduced bird mortality from disease and predators.

The 1970s saw the sale of eggs through supermarkets and the expansion of eggs into the New Zealand diet.

Over time free-range and barn systems have been introduced and the traditional battery cages have been replaced with modern conventional cages. The proposal in the Code of Animal Welfare is that these conventional cages are replaced by colony systems.

Role of Eggs in Our Diet

How many eggs do we eat?

The average New Zealander ate 223 eggs in 2009. In comparison, in Australia, the figure was 194 and in the UK, it was 189 – internationally we are amongst the highest consumers.

Why are they so good for us?

- An egg contains the highest quality protein available in food. Egg protein boasts all essential amino acids.
- The carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin, antioxidants shown to be critical for maintaining eyes health, are found in eggs.
- Eggs contain vitamins, including vitamin A, riboflavin vitamin B₂ and folate. They are also one of the few foods naturally containing vitamin D.
- Eggs contain calcium and phosphorus for building and maintaining bones and teeth, and also iron, iodine and zinc.
- Eggs are rich in acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter which assists brain function. Choline is also important in cell membrane functions throughout the body.
- Being high in protein, eggs help people feel fuller for longer, making them a useful food for maintaining healthy body weight.
- Contemporary independent research has now debunked the myth that eggs adversely affect serum cholesterol.
- Eggs are a natural product

What is the Egg Producers Federation (EPF)?

The EPF is the industry body for all egg producers. Its members farm in a range of production systems including free-range, barn, conventional cages and now colony systems.

There are 155 egg farms in New Zealand, with 3.2 million birds and employing 800 people and producing annual sales of \$280 million. The vast majority of farmers are small owner operators.