



# **EGG PRODUCERS FEDERATION**

of New Zealand (Inc)

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Why is it not possible to visit a poultry farm like you can a dairy farm?**

The New Zealand poultry industry has the best animal health status in the world. We are free of the three major exotic poultry diseases, Avian Influenza (Bird Flu), Infectious Bursal Disease and New Castle's Disease. No other countries in the world can make that claim. In fact, fresh poultry is not imported into New Zealand in order to protect our unique disease-free status. We know that once a disease enters the poultry population, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to regain freedom from that disease.

The old proverb says "an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure". That is why the industry has strict biosecurity standards. An effective farm biosecurity programme requires minimal contact with unnecessary persons, vehicles and other animals as these can all carry diseases. To protect the health of their flocks, all poultry farmers control who comes in contact with their birds. It's not impossible to visit a poultry farm - all it takes is planning and talking to the farmer before you visit.

### **Are all shell eggs in New Zealand produced here?**

All fresh shell eggs consumed in New Zealand are produced domestically. New Zealand's poultry flock is unique, in that it is free from the three major worldwide poultry diseases – Infectious Bursal Disease, Newcastle's Disease and Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza.

As imported fresh shell eggs could carry these diseases, they are not currently imported into New Zealand, to protect our unique disease-free status. Raw imported shell eggs could also carry diseases which may pose a risk to native birds, so it is important to minimise this risk to help protect our native avian fauna.

### **How many layer hens are found in New Zealand?**

On average, 3.2 million layer hens are kept in New Zealand.

### **How many eggs are produced and consumed in New Zealand?**

In 2009, a total of 972,322,206 eggs were produced in New Zealand. The average New Zealander ate 223 eggs in the year of 2009.

### **Is it true that chicken meat comes from egg laying chickens that have passed their productive peak?**

Chickens used for meat production and those used for egg production are very separate breeds. However, some meat from egg-laying chickens is used in a variety of processed products. Meat from egg-laying chickens constitutes only about 0.75% of the total market in New Zealand, so 99.25% of the time, you will be eating chicken meat from a chicken specifically bred for it.

### **Are hormones used in egg production?**

No hormones are used at all in the poultry industry, in meat or eggs. This is a common misconception about the poultry industry, but it is simply not true.

### **Are antibiotics fed to layer hens?**

Antibiotics usage in layer hen flocks in New Zealand is uncommon due to the very low level of diseases. If antibiotics are required during the laying period for the control or treatment of disease, they can only be given under veterinary prescription and control. Any withholding periods associated with the use of that antibiotic are strictly adhered to, to ensure that there is no residue in the egg.

### **Do hens have their beaks trimmed?**

Beak treatment is a practice used in all production systems—free range, barn and cage—in the interests of animal welfare, to prevent instances of feather pecking. Modern beak tipping is done with an infra-red beam and removes just the very tip of the beak. An infra-red beam is passed over the tip of the beak, where there is no nervous tissue, and the part exposed to the beam is gradually worn down over the next 1-4 weeks. The two major hatcheries in New Zealand both use infra-red beam for beak trimming.

### **How is layer hen welfare governed in New Zealand?**

The welfare of all laying hens – cage, barn and free-range – is strictly governed by the Animal Welfare (Layer Hen) Code of Welfare 2005. This comprehensive guide to hen welfare was created by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC), a ministerial advisory committee composed of animal welfare experts and advisors. The Code is under review and a new draft Code will be released in early 2011.

### **What are the legal definitions of a free-range/cage/barn production system in New Zealand?**

The legal definitions of ‘free-range’, ‘cage’ and ‘barn’ are set out in the Animal Welfare (Layer Hen) Code of Welfare 2005.

Free-range is defined as “a system providing birds with access to an extensive outdoor area and which typically includes housing (either fixed or moveable) similar to a barn, aviary or perchery without cages.”

Cage is defined as “Cages or cage systems which provide up to 550 sq.cm per bird.”

Barn is defined as “A building housing layer hens without cages, on a single level, and without access to an outdoor area”.

### **What is the percentage makeup of cage/barn/free-range for New Zealand layer hen housing?**

Approximately 88% of New Zealand layer hens are housed in cages, 1.4% in barns and 10.6% in free-range system.

### **What is a Colony System?**

Colony Systems are starting to be used in New Zealand. A commonly accepted definition is a modified and enlarged cage with more space than conventional cages and with perching, nesting and dusting bathing areas. It may also have an abrasive strip for claw shortening. A colony may also be referred to as a furnished or enriched cage, or furnished or enriched colony.

### **What is the Avian Influenza situation in New Zealand?**

Biosecurity New Zealand has recently completed a comprehensive surveillance program of the commercial meat and egg poultry flocks in New Zealand. This survey found that there was no Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza present in New Zealand. Further active

and passive surveillance methods in the future will ensure that any possible threats to the health of the New Zealand poultry flock (or its people) will be detected and contained quickly.

**Is Salmonella present in New Zealand eggs?**

Although this is occasionally rumoured, due to Salmonella being an issue in eggs for many overseas countries, this is not true of New Zealand. A recent independent study by ESR has found that there is no Salmonella in New Zealand eggs.