

EGG PRODUCERS FEDERATION

of New Zealand (Inc)

Media Release

Statement by Michael Guthrie Chair of Egg Producers Federation (EPF)

Tuesday 8 February 2011

Draft Code of Animal Welfare for Layer Hens

Egg farmers cautiously welcome the draft “Code for Animal Welfare – Layer Hens” released today by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF).

The key recommendation, to gradually phase out conventional cages, is consistent with the industry’s own direction. However careful consideration around the timing of any transition is vital to ensure both consumers and egg farmers are not adversely impacted by the changes.

Central to any change is the ability to continue to meet the market’s demand for eggs at a reasonable cost. Eggs are a staple food in our national diet and we are big egg eaters by international standards. They are an important source of affordable nutrition and with 88% of consumers currently choosing to buy caged eggs, affordability needs to be maintained.

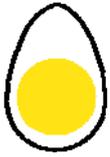
The Industry recognises that conventional cages limit birds’ ability to express natural behaviour and have been looking at alternatives for some years. Until the recent development of the colony system there has been nothing available that meets the objective of improved welfare without pushing eggs beyond the means of the general consumer.

The colony system, which is being adopted in Europe, encourages natural behaviours while retaining the advantages of cages, particularly low mortality rates and greater protection from disease.

While the New Zealand egg industry supports the introduction of colony systems the significant investment required by individual operators means change cannot happen overnight.

New systems will cost up to 40% more than conventional cages. Existing cage assets will become worthless once the new regulations apply, so farmers need to have the ability to use those cages for their full economic life.

Because the majority of egg farmers are smaller operators it won’t be feasible to buy into colony systems while still paying for their existing cages. This is likely to drive smaller operators out of business and make egg farming the sole domain of the large operators. Mandatory regulation change that costs small business operators their livelihood is neither necessary nor acceptable to us as an industry.



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The Egg Producers Federation represents all commercial egg producers in New Zealand including free range, barn and caged. Diversity in both production methods and scale of operators assist in ensuring the New Zealand Egg industry remains progressive and forward thinking.

As part of on-going industry research and development, the EPF, over the past three years, has contributed funding towards a \$1 million pilot project trialling the colony system in a New Zealand setting with a view of long term implementation.

The pilot project has been in collaboration with MAF and the United Kingdom's University of Bristol, international experts in animal welfare. After nearly three years these systems are demonstrating their capability in the New Zealand environment and have given us the confidence to consider transitioning to their use.

This colony system gives birds additional space with areas for perching, laying and scratching so they can engage in natural behaviours that are not possible in the conventional cages including standing erect and spreading their wings. Ability for hens to demonstrate natural behaviour is the key difference between conventional cages and free range or barn raised flocks and now colony systems.

ENDS

Released by Egg Producers Federation of New Zealand (EPF)

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