

AECL welcomes 'free range' egg labelling clarity



Publication: 31 March 2016
Categories: Media Releases
Reading time: 2 minutes

The Australian Egg Corporation Limited (AECL) today welcomed the agreement by Commonwealth, State and Territory Consumer Affairs Ministers on a new definition for 'free range' eggs that will apply across Australia.

The decision by the Consumer Affairs Forum follows an extensive consultation process between government, regulators, the egg industry, peak representative associations and expert industry service bodies such as AECL.

AECL's Managing Director, Mr James Kellaway, said that national consensus on egg labelling is a win for both consumers and producers as it introduces a consistent regime nationwide and removes the uncertainty that has plagued the egg industry and the egg category for years.

"It is pleasing to note that this 'free range' egg labelling decision takes into account the findings of the independent consumer research undertaken and submitted in the consultation process by AECL," Mr Kellaway said.

"The new definition is fundamentally about doing the right thing by consumers to ensure they can make informed decisions about what eggs they wish to buy based on known factors."

Since researching and starting to address this issue, AECL adopted a robust, scientific and consumer-led approach to the new national egg labelling rules, including providing the results of independent qualitative and quantitative research exploring consumer attitudes in relation to layer farming systems and hen welfare, and expectations when it comes labelling.

"The definition arrived at today has been shaped by science and our own extensive research into what consumers expect when it comes to egg labelling," Mr Kellaway said.

The announcement confirms what AECL believes the vast majority of egg producers have been doing in practice now for many years. It also places a realistic cap on outdoor stocking densities when under the 4th edition of the Model Code of Practice – Domestic Poultry, there has been no cap or maximum density. This decision will permit greater competition and innovation among farmers of free range eggs.

"Any confusion about what constitutes 'free range' is not just bad for consumers, it has become a significant issue for the egg industry, so it is worth noting that egg producers themselves have been among the strongest advocates for a national definition," Mr Kellaway said.

"Today's outcome strikes the right balance between empowering consumers with accurate information and ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of Australia's egg industry by requiring all Australian egg producers adhere to accepted principles.

"AECL will now work to codify the new definition into its national quality assurance scheme designed to help egg producers develop approved processes on-farm."

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