NATIONAL
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NEWSPAPER

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Dr Jared Greenville and ABARES panellists from the Commodities Spotlight session Emily Dahl, Fred Litchfield, Gaby Coulthard, Patrick Mulcahy, Harrison Tuynman and Stephanie Black.

A message from ABARES

AT the recent Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences Outlook 2025 conference, hundreds of our stakeholders gathered to discuss the sector's challenges, evolving needs and potential solutions.

A clear take away was the need to continue the conversation around agriculture's responsiveness to climate change, geopolitical instability and changing market conditions.

Recent ABARES articles on harmful agricultural support, dairy productivity and non-tariff barriers are helping to inform those discussions.

Thank you to all who attended and presented at ABARES Outlook 2025 – we are especially grateful for the support of platinum sponsors, the Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations.

Conference sessions are available on our YouTube channel.

Outlook also marked 80 years of ABARES as a research organisation.

The quality of our graduates over the years has been key to our longevity and the trust placed in our independent data, research and analysis.

We're now looking for the next generation of ABARES graduates to work on some of the biggest challenges facing agriculture, with applications now open for the ABARES Stream of the 2026 Graduate Development Program.

To learn more, scan the QR code.

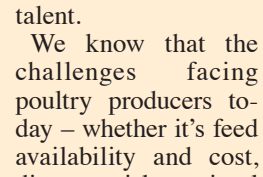
Dr Jared Greenville
ABARES Executive Director

The Welcome Sundowners event was proudly sponsored by the Rural Research and Development Corporations.

Scan to apply for ABARES Stream.

PHA updates and invites involvement

by **TAMSYN CROWLEY**
Director



AT Poultry Hub Australia, we're constantly looking forward – thinking about how to support the poultry industry, not only today but well into the future.

Our role is to ensure that innovation, education and practical research continue to thrive in the Australian poultry sector.

It's a big task, though one we're deeply committed to.

I wanted to take a moment to share some key updates of our work and to invite you to be part of the journey.

An exciting development for us has been the appointment of Dr Amy Moss as our lead poultry researcher.

Many of you will be familiar with Amy's work already through her time at the University of New England, where she has built a strong reputation in poultry nutrition, particularly around feed efficiency, the use of alternative feed ingredients and reducing the environmental footprint of poultry production.

Amy brings a fantastic combination of deep scientific knowledge, industry understanding and a genuine enthusiasm for problem solving.

She's making a big impact at PHA already, helping shape our research agenda and working closely with stakeholders to ensure our projects are grounded in the practical realities of industry.

Her leadership is helping us take a more strategic approach to research investment – one that's not only focused on scientific rigour but also on outcomes that are relevant, usable and valuable across the supply chain.

We have also launched a project recently that has been in the works for some time and of which I'm particularly proud – the master's course in poultry nutrition.

Developed in collaboration with the University of New England, this new online course is a direct response to what we've been hearing from across the sector.

That there's a growing need for specialised skills, deeper technical knowledge and pathways for career development within poultry – this course offers exactly that.

It's designed for people who want to gain advanced skills in poultry nutrition, whether they are entering the field or working in industry or research already.

The curriculum combines the latest scientific thinking with real-world application.

This kind of training is critical if we want to ensure a strong capable workforce to support the future of poultry in Australia.

These developments are all part of our broader PHA strategy, which is built around three key pillars:

- Impactful research that tackles industry challenges head-on
- Education and training that build the skills and knowledge we need
- Capacity building to future-proof the sector and attract new talent.

We know that the challenges facing poultry producers today – whether it's feed availability and cost, disease risk, animal welfare, environmental pressure or consumer expectations – aren't going away.

But we also know that by investing in the right people, the right science and the right partnerships, we can continue to thrive.

And that brings me to a very important point – we want to hear from you.

PHA doesn't operate in a vacuum.

Our work is shaped by conversations, by collaboration and by listening to the people who live and breathe poultry every day.

If you have a research idea, a training need, a project you'd like to partner on or even some thoughts about where the industry is headed, we'd love to hear from you.

Your insights help guide our decisions and your experience on the ground ensures we're investing where it matters most.

Whether you're based on-farm, in a feed mill, in processing, research, policy or beyond, your voice is important in shaping the next chapter of our work.

So, let's keep the conversation going.

Reach out to us anytime and let's work together to ensure the Australian poultry industry remains strong, smart and sustainable now and into the future.

PHA's lead poultry researcher Dr Amy Moss.

NATIONAL Poultry NEWSPAPER

Poultry Industry Calendar of Events

2025

MAY 17 – Rare Poultry Breeders Association annual show, Maitland Showground NSW, showsecretary@rarepoultrybreedersassociation.com

MAY 14-16 – VIV Turkey, Istanbul, Turkey. www.vivturkey.com

JUN 14 – Hamburgh Club of NSW annual show, Mudgee Showground NSW, hamburghclubnsw@gmail.com or 0408 616 805

JUN 23-26 – 24th European Symposium on Poultry Nutrition, Maastricht, Netherlands. www.espn2025.eu

JUN 24-26 – 11th International Symposium on Avian Influenza, Newfoundland, Canada. harlowagency.swoogo.com/isai2025/6355095

AUG 18-22 – 15th International Seminar on Poultry Pathology and Production, Georgia USA.

SEP 14-17 – 20th European Symposium on the Quality of Eggs and Egg Products and the 26th European Symposium on the Quality of Poultry Meat, Zadar, Croatia. eggmeat2025.com

OCT 6-10 – 23rd WVPA Congress Kuching, Malaysia. www.wvpac2025.com

How to supply event details:
Send all details to National Poultry Newspaper, PO Box 162, Wynnum Qld 4178, call 0450 672 553 or email design@collins.media

poultrynews.com.au

0450 672 553

IPC members from the African delegation and ACMF deputy chief executive officer Verity Price.

Australian chicken meat industry's sustainability leadership takes centre stage at IPC 2025

AUSTRALIA'S reputation as a world leader in sustainable poultry meat production was in the spotlight recently at the 2025 International Poultry Council meeting in Casablanca, Morocco.

Australian Chicken Meat Federation deputy chief executive officer Verity Price presented Australia's pioneering Chicken Meat Sustainability Framework – the first of its kind globally – complete with specific metrics and targets for the sector.

Speaking to more than 230 international delegates, Ms Price demonstrated how Australia's focus on precision farming, high welfare standards and environmental responsibility has resulted in emissions per kilogram of boneless chicken meat being well below the global average of 4.12kg carbon dioxide

Her presentation on Australia's efficiency-driven approach and environmental stewardship served as a call to action for global industry representatives at various stages of environmental, social and governance adoption and showcased how a well calibrated and strategically invested approach to productivity, welfare and sustainability can drive meaningful environmental progress.

A global perspective on highly pathogenic avian influenza

The Australian Chicken Meat Federation also engaged with global counterparts on highly pathogenic avian influenza, particularly the evolving role of vaccination in preparedness and outbreak response.

While vaccines are increasingly recognised as a core emergency animal disease preparedness tool, they are not a standalone solution for managing

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Verity with IPC president Ricardo Santin.

Verity met leaders from the global poultry industry.

Panel discussion wrap up.

Australian chicken meat industry's sustainability leadership takes centre stage at IPC 2025

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HPAI outbreaks.

International delegates shared insights on their experiences handling outbreaks and discussed how compartmentalisation strategies have helped maintain trade, limit the spread of HPAI and mitigate broader economic impacts.

The breadth of topics discussed – including sustainability, biosecurity, trade and market insights – highlighted the magnitude of the evolving global challenges within the poultry industry.

Shared market insights pointed to a universal trend – chicken meat consumption is rising, especially among younger consumers, and while this growth brings opportunity, it also underscores the need for continued investment in production efficiency, research and development and biosecurity preparedness.

Ensuring the sector can meet rising food demands while catering to the expectations of the modern consumer remains a collective priority to ensure ongoing sustainable growth.

Strengthening global collaboration

Beyond individual presentations, IPC 2025 fostered meaningful international collaboration, with representatives from 43 countries.

The event encouraged industry leaders to rethink conventional approaches and explore innovative solutions across critical areas such as trade, animal welfare, skills development and sustainability – issues with far-reaching global implications.

Held during the event, the IPC's twentieth anniversary dinner celebrated the global poultry community's progress and reminded attendees of the critical role leadership plays in shaping a sector that is vital to global food security and a lower-emissions future.

For the Australian poultry industry, IPC 2025 was an opportunity to reaffirm its global leadership in sustainable production.

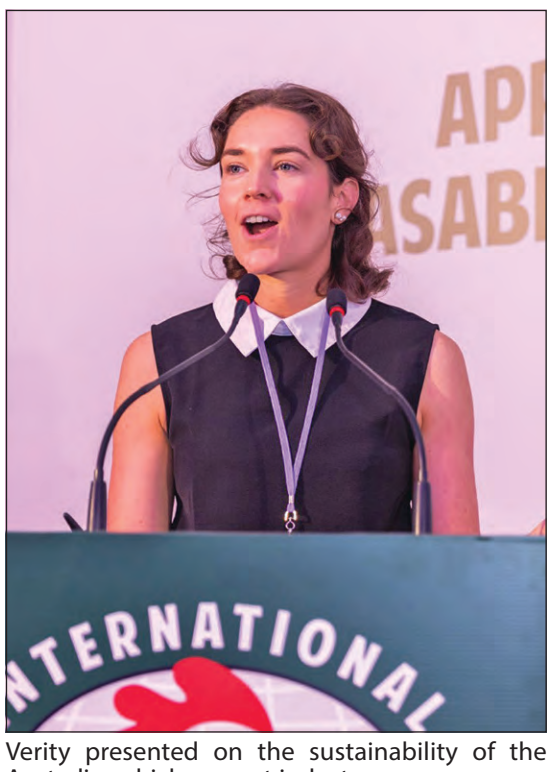
As challenges and opportunities continue to emerge, international dialogue remains essential to ensuring the responsible evolution of poultry farming, balancing productivity, profitability and environmental stewardship for generations to come.

ACMF

Verity introduced the Australian chicken meat sustainability framework to the IPC 2025 delegates.

IPC celebrated 20 years at this year's event.

Verity at IPC 2025 welcome reception.



Verity presented on the sustainability of the Australian chicken meat industry.

Of great importance

It is important for Australians to understand the extent of change in relation to the food imported into Australia.


Due in part to migration, people having the wealth to purchase foods of cuisines not traditionally Australian. Photo: RDNE Stock Project

IF there's one thing that is Australian, it's our eggs – but how about the influence from other nations?

The fact that Australia doesn't import shell eggs is so important to our domestic egg industry – to ensure we reduce the impact of diseases from other nations.

Further to this, it is important for all Australians to understand the extent of change in relation to our food dependency – this is the food that is imported into Australia.

People often focus only on the volume of exports heading outwards from Australia, but we should all be aware of the imports of product too.

In the 1980s, the amount of food Australia imported was less than 10 percent of all imports, equating to about $2.4 billion.

Why do we have imports of food?

People often want to purchase items not available in large quantities in Australia, such as coffee.

Let's face it… it's due in part to migration – people having the wealth to purchase foods of cuisines not traditionally Australian – however there are also economic reasons at play.

Egg Farmers of Australia

by **MELINDA HASHIMOTO**
CEO

In 2023, Australia imported approximately $21.13 billion worth of consumer-oriented food products, fish and seafood.

The US accounted for about $1.98 billion, representing 10 percent of these imports.

Many people will try to pretend that what goes on in the US doesn't influence what happens Down Under.

Yet the US has a lot going for it – low power costs, low labour costs and subsidies to support agriculture, allowing food to be cheaply produced domestically.

Americans will buy American made and recently we have seen the US president support agriculture – most particularly, with a financial package for the poultry industry impacted by avian influenza.

Unknown to some people, America's politics, economy, military, culture and technology are all part of the influence on Australians.

Use an Apple phone, Microsoft software and search on Google?

These are all American companies that we support and use daily.

People are digitally influenced through YouTube, Facebook for us oldies (now known as Meta) and Instagram.

Drink Coca-Cola, Starbucks or eat McDonalds?

All American parent companies.

Though streaming services have provided a greater variety of programming, many of us still love a blockbuster from Hollywood.

The US national basketball league, national football league and fitness culture, such as CrossFit and Ultimate Fighting Championship, have influenced some segments of the Australian population – cultural influence through sports.

In the very romanticised relationship that Australians have with Europe, anyone who doesn't believe America has a major influence is kidding themselves… but back to imports and eggs.

I have heard segments of the population say we shouldn't import anything and support only Australian products, however they forget the flip side – that other countries won't take our products if we don't take some of theirs.

In the 2024 financial year, Australia imported $32.11 million of egg powder at a volume of 1874.61mt.

As mentioned previously, the US has advantages in its production of such product.

Egg Farmers of Australia has found that the monitoring of exports and imports is important to our industry, many members of Parliament ask about the volumes of import and export and what this means for our industry domestically.

While Australia's egg industry remains proudly self-reliant in shell egg production, the broader landscape of food imports highlights our interconnectedness with global markets, underscoring the need for balanced trade and ongoing vigilance to protect local agriculture.

Brisbane attracts premier agriculture investment event

ALL eyes are on Queensland as Brisbane successfully attracts the world's premier agriculture investment event – Global AgInvesting.

Brisbane will roll out the welcome mat in June 2026 for top global investors, agribusiness leaders and agtech pioneers for an exclusive two-day program and optional regional site tours.

Investors will get a first-hand look at Queensland's thriving primary industries and world-class agtech innovations.

GAI Australia provides an exciting opportunity to position Queensland as the premier gateway into the Asia-Pacific for international agricultural investment, unlock new opportunities at scale and attract new capital.


Global AgInvesting to be held in Brisbane in 2026.

Agriculture workforce options under attack

THE National Farmers' Federation has issued a stark warning that mounting red tape and increasingly complex labour laws are choking access to the workers agriculture desperately needs, placing Australia's food security, farm viability and regional economies at serious risk.

NFF president David Jochinke said that workforce access is shaping up to be one of the most pressing issues for farmers this election.

"We're calling on all political leaders to understand that without a reliable farm workforce, our ability to produce affordable, high-quality food and fibre is under direct threat," Mr Jochinke said.

"Labour shortages are already forcing some farmers to leave crops unharvested, turn away business or scale back production.

"Staff costs make up around a third of farm expenses, and access to workers can mean the difference between a successful season or watching produce rot in the paddock."

Mr Jochinke said farmers want to get on with the job of growing food, not navigating a maze of bureaucracy and visa confusion.

"From skilled workers to seasonal help, we need a system that works with us, not against us," he said.

"This election is a critical moment to fix Australia's broken farm labour pipeline."

Domestic worktforce

"On the home front, farmers are grappling with increasingly complex industrial relations laws," Mr Jochinke said.

"We're asking for a review into these laws because we believe there are huge productivity gains to be achieved by adjusting these rules.

"Small and family run farms are strug-

☛ continued P5

NFF president David Jochinke.

The NFF believes extending the Agcareerstart gap year program for another three years would help bolster the domestic workforce.

Agriculture workforce options under attack

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gling to navigate confusing rhetoric on pay rates, overtime, worker classification, compliance with fair work statutory regimes and more.

"Farmers want to pay their workers a fair wage, but complicated industrial relations laws could be streamlined so farmers can spend more time out in the paddock, rather than chained to the desk."

The NFF also believes that extending the highly successful Agcareerstart gap year program for another three years and establishing a dedicated agriculture trade apprenticeship would help bolster the domestic workforce.

"The NFF, along with its members, have worked hard to put practical workforce solutions on the table for the incoming Federal Government," he said.

Overseas workforce

Mr Jochinke said employers relied on multiple secure pathways for overseas workers.

"Short-term, we need to fix the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme, streamline the skilled visa system and retain the Working Holiday Maker visa scheme," he said.

Adding that the PALM scheme is especially fraught, becoming unworkable for many growers thanks to rigid rules and administrative burden.

"There was real concern raised when the migration review flagged limiting, or worse, removing the 88-day regional work incentive for backpackers," he said.

"Thousands of backpackers choose to work in agriculture and without them we will see farmers walk away from farming.

"Long-term, we'd like to see a dedicated farm visa for those who want to come and work on Aussie farms.

"Farmers are dealing with a hotchpotch of migration streams, including the backpackers, which are not designed directly for agriculture.

"We note the coalition's commitment to introducing a visa for agriculture and 100 percent throw our support behind that.

"Farmers need a strong workforce strategy – from backpackers to skilled migrants to young Aussies giving agriculture a go."

Following recent announcements from the major parties about migration cuts, the NFF has received assurances from the coalition that these would not impact agriculture.

It has now called on Labor to do the same.

"Any politician serious about addressing cost of living will recognise a viable workforce is key to making sure food prices don't continue to climb."

Early bird tickets on sale for AgXchange Australia

TICKETS are now on sale for AgXchange Australia 2025, the National Farmers' Federation's reimagined national conference, bringing together the full breadth of Australia's agricultural supply chain.

Taking place on the Gold Coast over September 23-25, AgXchange will unite farmers, agribusinesses, policymakers, researchers and industry leaders to tackle the biggest issues facing agriculture.

NFF president David Jochinke said, "This isn't just a talkfest."

"It's where practical ideas meet big-picture thinking to shape the future of Australian food and fibre production and distribution.

"Whether you're working on the land, on the tools, in the lab or at the policy table, AgXchange is your space to connect, collaborate and drive change."

AgXchange is built around five core themes:

- Innovation – from on-farm tech to productivity breakthroughs
- Sustainability – including carbon, water and circular economy challenges
- Risk – tackling drought, biosecurity, succession and trade volatility
- Farming communities – covering workforce, safety and social license
- Supply chain – from gate to global markets.

Over three days, attendees will hear from keynote speakers, take part in solution-focused panels and get hands-on in interactive sessions tailored for every part of the supply chain.

Early bird tickets available now

Early bird pricing is now live, with a range of flexible options:

- Discounted rates for farmers and NFF members
- One-day passes for busy schedules
- Special pricing for emerging leaders under 35.

Mr Jochinke urged those across the ag sector to get in early.

"Don't wait for change to happen to you," he said.

"Be part of the conversation and help drive it.

"This is your seat at the table."

Tickets and more info available at agxchange.com.au

Let's commit to a better life for meat chickens

Farmers markets are an option for consumers chasing chicken meat from slower-growing breeds or at least meat chickens raised free range or on pasture. Ask the question of the seller to rest assured.

So cheap and so big at $5.50/kg and weighing 1.24kg in March, these Macro free range chickens are a Woolworths' private-label chicken, labelled as foraging and socialising outdoors. Despite the breed very likely to be a fast-growing meat breed, that's a positive at least.

CHICKEN is the most popular meat protein around the world, probably because it's so cheap.

Confession – I like chicken and eat plenty of it, but probably largely because it is cheap relative to other meat proteins such as pork and beef, which both have better and bigger taste profiles.

So, why is chicken so cheap?

An interesting question and one Better Chicken Australia – a joint project of three national animal welfare organisations from Australia and New Zealand, and effectively the Down Under representative of the global Better Chicken Commitment movement – has attempted to answer.

So, here goes.

The breeds of chicken raised for meat are super-efficient at turning the food they eat into muscle because the industry made them that way.

Meat chickens, often referred to as 'broilers', are completely different breeds to the chickens raised for egg laying.

These separate breeds were first invented in the 1950s.

Before then, chickens were farmed as dual purpose to produce both eggs and meat.

From the 1950s, the chicken industry began focusing on selectively breeding chickens that grew bigger and faster.

Those chickens were only kept for a few months before they were slaughtered for meat, so not much attention was paid to the side effects of genetic selection for fast growth.

Cant Comment

by **BRENDON CANT**

Many people prefer chicken breast meat, so there was also selection for chickens that grew very large breast muscles.

This genetic selection over many chicken generations – combined with modifying their food for maximum growth and engineering their living conditions to raise as many chickens as possible as cheaply as possible – has come at a huge cost to animal welfare.

Between 1950 and 2005, meat chicken growth rate increased more than 400 percent.

In the 1950s, commercially raised meat chickens took 70 days to reach about 1.4kg, which is when they were slaughtered.

By the 1990s, it took only 52 days for a chicken to grow to a new slaughter weight of 2.3kg.

Today, chickens can reach that same weight in just 35 days, the age when many are now slaughtered.

So, while the above goes some way to explaining why chicken meat is so cheap and consumers have enjoyed that, these 'cheap chickens' have paid the price with severe and debilitating health issues.

Better Chicken Australia has explanations for that too.

Walking problems are one of the easiest animal welfare issues to spot.

We can't see metabolic disease or know from the outside that an animal's heart is enlarged or over-worked, but we can see when birds are unable to walk and easily imagine that they are in constant pain and may not be able to get to food and water.

Fast-growing meat chickens put so much weight on so quickly that their leg bones may become deformed.

This problem is exacerbated by a genetic predisposition to leg deformities.

It's such a significant issue that producers have tried to selectively breed chickens with fewer leg problems.

Some success was reported from these efforts, showing that selective breeding may be able to improve the welfare and health of fast-growing meat chickens, however leg deformities were still occurring.

The larger breast muscles meat chickens have been bred to produce create a shift in how meat chickens carry their body weight, with more weight in front of their legs.

This can cause tiny fractures in the largest weight-bearing leg bones – femurs – and these fractures are then prone to bacterial infection.

The weight shift also seems to be associated with poor gait in general, as slower-growing chickens uniformly show very little limping or other walking problems.

The prevalence of walking problems varies in fast-growing chickens but is always much more common.

We know they are in pain because chickens badly affected will move around more if they are given pain relief medication.

Meat chickens are also prone to skin inflammation on their feet and hocks – the joint on a bird's leg that looks like a backwards knee.

This has been recorded to occur in 7 percent of fast-growing chickens but only 1 percent of slower-growing chickens when kept at lower stocking densities.

Birds kept at higher stocking densities are more likely to show these problems because of the poor condition of the ground they live on.

More birds per square metre means more manure, which leads to damp litter, and this can cause skin irritation.

Fast-growing chickens are also more likely to have more skin contact with this manure because they're far more likely to have difficulty walking normally.

Another study reported that fast-growing chickens were much more likely to have skin inflammation on their hocks than slower-growing chickens when both were at the same stocking density.

This was likely due to the changed body shape and weight of faster-growing birds changing the way they stand and walk.

Leg problems and skin problems on the feet also have a strong impact on how chickens walk, meaning faster-growing chickens are more likely to show lameness, such as limping, than slower-growing chickens kept at the same stocking density.

Skin burns and blisters are also seen on other parts of meat chickens such as the breast.

This is again more prevalent in fast-growing birds and likely because these birds are less mobile, so are spending more time sitting in contact with the ground.

In addition, fast-growing birds show a range of muscular abnormalities believed to be related to their growth rate and heavy selection for large breast muscles.

Fast-growing chickens are suffering in bodies that make it difficult and even painful to move.

This is worse when their living conditions make it harder to move and keep their bodies healthy.

Simply slowing down the unnaturally fast growth of chickens raised for meat by a few weeks makes a huge difference to their ability to move around and support their own body's weight.

Clearly consumers, including myself, can play a part in improving the lives of broilers, yet this involves boycotting the fast-growing types outlined above and seeking out slower-growing breeds that hopefully have been raised in better more natural environments.

Albeit they will typically be more expensive.

While this might be a false hope at least for the foreseeable future, the lives of today's broilers have no hope of enjoying a reasonable quality of life, given the genetic and growing conditions effectively thrust upon them.

Public submissions open for ABARES Australian chicken meat industry review

ABARES is seeking submissions to inform its review of the Australian chicken meat industry and has released an Issues Paper to assist.

Submissions can be made via Have Your Say until May 30, 2025 – haveyoursay.agriculture.gov.au/chicken-meat-industry-review – including via written submissions or through a guided portal.

Submissions are open to all interested parties and will not be published.

Confidentiality deeds are also available for all submissions.

ABARES was commissioned to conduct an independent review into the relationship between growers and integrated producers in the Australian chicken meat supply chain.

The terms of reference for the review are publicly available – agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/chicken-meat-supply-chain-review

The review will examine whether there is evidence of market failure within the industry and, if so, potential actions that could be introduced, as applicable.

The review will also consider information contained in recent industry inquiries and examine the industry's evolution over time.

As part of the review, ABARES will conduct stakeholder engagement across all relevant parts of the chicken meat industry.

ABARES will provide a draft report for stakeholder review and comment by mid-2025, with a final report to government due as soon as practicable thereafter.

Gorman-Rupp U Series pump delivers quality and reliability at AJ Bush facility

WE have all been there… that moment when equipment failure brings operations to a grinding halt, leaving you scrambling for solutions while watching the clock tick away.

But for Chris Nyhuis, the utilities supervisor at AJ Bush's Bromelton facility, this is a distant concern, thanks to the reliability of the Gorman-Rupp U Series pump.

Gorman-Rupp has been designing, machining, assembling and testing its pumps at its manufacturing plant in Mansfield, Ohio in the US since 1933.

A tradition it continues to this day, to ensure customers receive the highest quality and best performing pumps.

During a recent site visit by Hydro Innovations Queensland regional manager Darren Caldwell, Chris said, "We have had this pump for over two years and it just keeps operating smoothly – barely any maintenance was required, apart from a few drops of oil once or twice over that time."

In an industrial environment where downtime means lost productivity and revenue, finding equipment you can truly count on is invaluable.

The U Series pump at AJ Bush exemplifies what reliability looks like in action – quietly performing day after day without demanding attention or resources.

What's particularly telling is how the U Series maintains the gold standard Chris has come to expect from the brand.

With the casual confidence of someone who has found equipment they can trust completely, he said, "We have at least 15 Gorman-Rupp pumps onsite and this U Series is just like the rest."

For operation supervisors such as Chris, this consistency translates to peace of mind.

No middle-of-the-night emergency calls.

No unexpected maintenance expenses.

Just the quiet assurance that comes from knowing your equipment is silently doing its job, exactly as designed.

In today's fast-paced industrial landscape, that kind of reliability isn't only convenient, it's essential.

For further information regarding the extensive range of Gorman Rupp self-priming pumps and the services that Hydro Innovations is able to offer to remedy your wastewater, sewerage, aeration and any pump issues, visit the very informative website at hydroinnovations.com or phone 02 9898 1800.

The utilities supervisor at AJ Bush's Bromelton facility thanks to the reliability of its Gorman-Rupp U Series pump.

Winter crop harvest to be third biggest

THE Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences has forecast the 2024-25 Australian winter crop to be the third largest on record – up 26 percent on the previous year to 59.8 million tonnes and 27 percent above the 10-year average to 2023-24 of 47.1 million tonnes.

Area planted to winter crops in 2024-25 was estimated to have increased by 8 percent to 24.9 million hectares – a new national record.

While national winter crop production was estimated to increase overall, seasonal conditions were mixed across Australian winter cropping regions.

Winter crop production was estimated to have increased by 79 percent in NSW and more than doubled in Queensland, with total production expected to reach the second highest and highest result on record, respectively.

Despite a dry start and below average in crop rainfall, total winter crop production in Western Australia was expected to reach the third highest level on record.

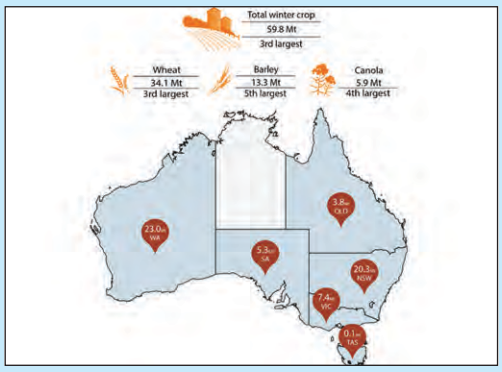
In contrast, production was estimated to be well below average in South Australia and Victoria.

Persistent dry conditions throughout the winter cropping season led to widespread moisture stress and significantly lower than average winter crop yields.

Large areas of southeastern Australia also experienced widespread severe frosts during September 2024, which compounded the lack of in-crop rainfall.

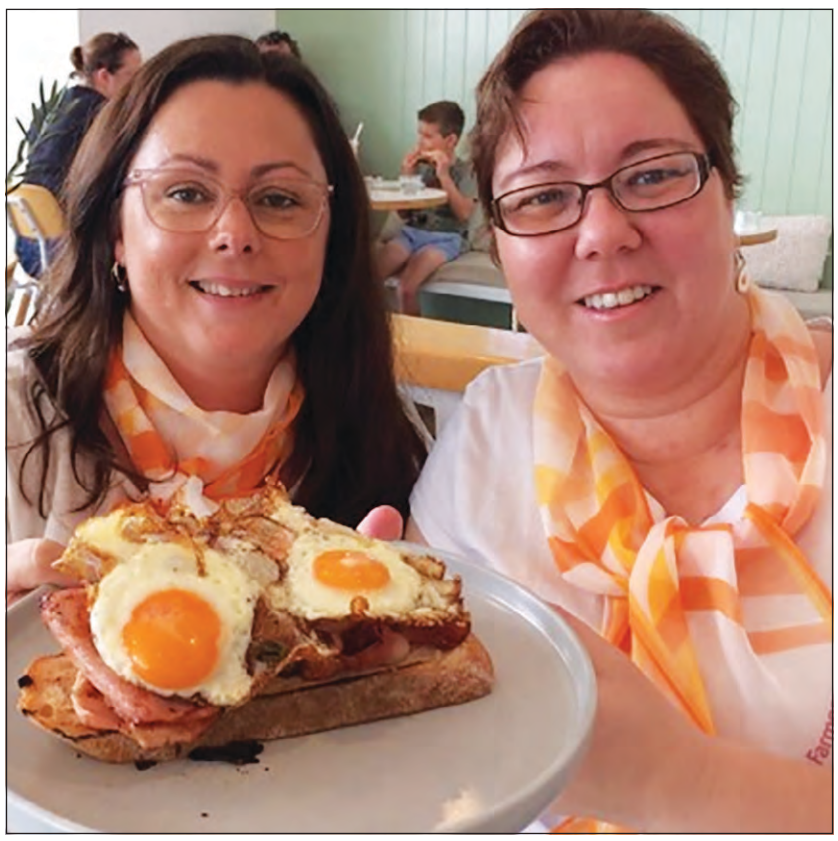
The latest forecasts can be found in the Australian Crop Report March 2025 by scanning the QR code.

Scan for Australian Crop Report.



Australian winter crop production 2024-25.

An interview with Melinda Hashimoto



Kylie Jackson and CEO Melinda Hashimoto of Egg Farmers of Australia.

IT was an honour to chat with Melinda Hashimoto, the chief executive officer of Egg Farmers of Australia.

Melinda is a farmer's daughter from a small beef property in Queensland.

Having attended university in Rockhampton for a Bachelor of Education, she remained in the area and then travelled to Japan, spending five years teaching there.

Upon returning to Australia, she completed an MBA at the University of Southern Queensland in Toowoomba.

Former career roles include adviser to ministers for agriculture at federal and state levels of government and the Queensland Department of Trade and Investment.

When asked her what attracted her to the poultry industry, her answer was that egg production is down to earth and thought-provoking.

As a child, Melinda grew up with hens, ducks and geese.

It's amazing how far biosecurity has come, we would never think of having a range of poultry on the one site now.

"The agricultural background was always there, even with my teaching career," Melinda said.

It was clear during our chat that Melinda put great emphasis on instilling the awareness of food security and making her students understand the roles of primary industries during her teaching career.

Her jobs in various tiers of government taught her the importance of advocacy and communication.

Melinda was attracted to the egg industry as it is an Australia industry geared almost entirely towards the domestic market, with a small amount of export.

It is one of the industries that is low in carbon emissions and highly efficient in resource use.

So, when the opportunity came knocking on her door in 2019, Melinda took up the position of CEO with EFA.

"Joining Egg Farmers of Australia was a great opportunity," she said.

"In this new role, I needed to re-establish the organisation – following EFA being in a 12-month recess.

"In a few short years, the EFA Board and staff are very proud of where we are today.

"The support I've received from people who've worked with me at EFA and those in the egg industry supply chain has been phenomenal."

Our conversation turned to the past few years of Melinda's experience in the egg industry.

She said her focus was on strengthening the network and working closely with government.

"The difference now of our organisation is that a lot of the industry is totally invested in it – the nutritionists, vets and researchers – you need the entire supply chain," Melinda said.

"EFA networks need to be open and accessible, everyone has a part to play."

When traveling for EFA, Melinda and Kylie Jackson – who works with Melinda – take the opportunity to visit sites, and this offers an amazing opportunity to learn about everything involved in running an egg farm.

The hands-on experience on farms has greatly strengthened how EFA operates and how it remains highly relevant to the interest of egg farmers.

On a day-to-day basis, Melinda balances between different focuses – carving out time for policy, preparation for meetings and following up queries.

Answering questions takes up a lot of her time, as she addresses members' requests for assistance while also facilitating linkages across the entire industry.

One of the EFA's key roles is advocacy.

The future of egg supply in Australia and the key policy issues affecting the egg industry require timely and effective communication between the egg industry and governments.

"It is best categorised as long, short and medium-term work plans," Melinda said.

"As there's only Kylie and I, there is always a focus to meet many deadlines."

Melinda outlined the three key areas of focus for the EFA.

First, ensuring a strong egg industry, with proactive and forward-thinking policies.

Second, rational discussions around standards and guidelines, especially around the phase-out of cage eggs.

The decision is now in the hands of the states to decide, but it is uncertain as to how monitoring will be handled if each state chooses different time frames.

How will this be regulated should one state ban the production of cage eggs and another allow their production?

Strong and effective communication will be required regarding the consequences of various decisions.

And third, a compulsory audit for all egg farmers may be some years off, however ensuring a level playing field is needed, and help for an increased level of biosecurity.

Melinda recognises that the challenges faced by agriculture as a whole are immense, though the egg industry has a very positive future as a main supplier of quality animal protein for human consumption.

Yet, the sector does face difficulty in attracting young people who are able to purchase farms with the capital required – which will see the continued consolidation of the industry – still there are many young vets, researchers and nutritionists in the industry.

EFA have a group called 'Gen Egg'.

Gen Egg meets quarterly, with an invited speaker at each meeting.

This allows for a casual conversation among the group and to discuss various egg industry topics of interest.

One third of EFA members are under 40 and are members of Gen Egg.

Melinda has an open invitation for students in the industry to join and become a Gen Egg and or an EFA member – "Be bold and come along to get involved in the poultry industry!"

Benjamin Geist and Christine Clark
University of Sydney

Melinda on the packing floor at Pace Farm at Parkwood near Canberra with Nathan Daniels.

HAVE YOUR SAY!

All producers are encouraged to send in letters to be published in NPN, outlining any concerns or issues they may have with the industry.

This is an open forum where you can cover any topic, whether for or against an issue.

Please send your letters to:
editorial@collins.media or
PO Box 162, Wynnum Qld 4178

NATIONAL Poultry NEWSPAPER

Why humans kill animals – Part 5

■ Delving into and discussing the ten reasons behind why

KILLING animals has been a ubiquitous human behaviour throughout history, yet it is becoming increasingly controversial and criticised in some parts of contemporary human society.

Over a multi-part series, researchers from around the globe review 10 primary reasons why humans kill animals, discuss the necessity or not of these forms of killing and describe the global ecological context for human killing of animals.

The article can be viewed in its entirety at sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969723039062

Humans historically and currently kill animals either directly or indirectly for the following reasons:

- Wild harvest or food acquisition
- Human health and safety
- Agriculture and aquaculture
- Urbanisation and industrialisation
- Invasive, overabundant or nuisance wildlife control
- Threatened species conservation
- Recreation, sport or entertainment
- Mercy or compassion
- Cultural and religious practice
- Research, education and testing.

The remaining reasons and conclusion are discussed here.

9. Cultural and religious practice

Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity – indeed almost all the world's major religions and cultures permit the killing of various animals for the purpose of eating meat (reasons 1 and 3).

Cultural practices around the world also sanction animal killing for non-consumptive purposes, including religious animal sacrifices to a deity or god.

Animals sacrificed to a deity may or may not be subsequently eaten.

Though 'life is dear to all' in Buddhism, where the precept 'one should not kill nor cause others to kill' is sometimes applied through strict vegetarianism, meat-eating is still commonplace in most Buddhist societies.

Other branches of Buddhism permit what might be described as 'scavenging' when the meat is available or offered rather than intentionally killed.

The sacrifice of sheep, goats, cows, camels and sometimes yaks and banteng is commonly practiced in Islamic communities around the world in association with the celebration of the Eid al-Adha (that is, 'feast of sacrifice', 'great feast', 'sacrifice feast', or 'goat feast') during the Hajj or pilgrimage.

In Indonesia alone, approximately 800,000 goats were sacrificed during the festival in 2014.

About 2.5 million sheep, cows and goats are sacrificed during this festival in Turkey each year, and about 10 million in Pakistan.

Muslims also perform animal sacrifices on other religious occasions.

Animal sacrifice is also widespread in polytheistic Hindu cultures, where various traditions sacrifice animals to a variety of deities, especially in India and Nepal, where mainly goats, buffaloes and chickens are killed.

Pacific Island cultures also sacrifice animals.

For example, chickens or goats are sacrificed to wanamo (a half-man half-dog spirit that protects the forest) in the Bundi region of Papua New Guinea to secure safe passage through the forest for people that do not belong to the local indigenous tribe.

Animal sacrifice is also common in many African cultures, such as the Isese or Yoruba religion found in West Africa and the Afro-American religions of the Caribbean.

Animal sacrifices were practiced extensively in ancient Jewish, Christian and other monotheistic cultures of the Near East and beyond in Europe and North Africa.

For ancient Jews and Christians, the practice was originally designed to teach about the future sacrifice of the Messiah or Jesus Christ, which then understandably ceased following Jesus' crucifixion circa 33 CE, when the sacrament or communion (that is, broken bread and wine) was instead instituted to remember Jesus' sacrifice.

A small number of contemporary Christian denominations in Europe, northern Africa and Mexico still practice a restricted form of animal sacrifice today, killing sheep, chickens or pigeons.

With a history deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian values, most contemporary western cultures do not exhibit

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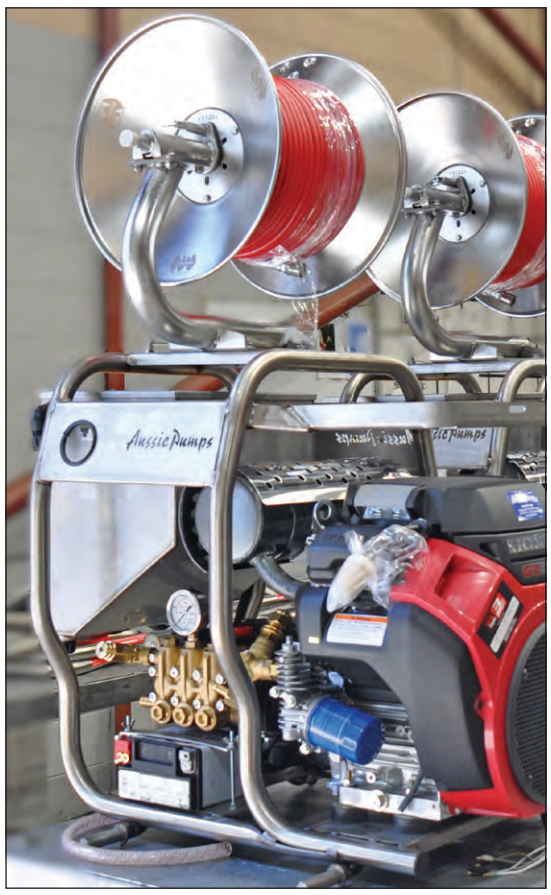
Not all cultural killing of animals is for religious reasons or involves sacrifice. Photo: Ashwini Chaudhary

Animals are used in scientific and medical research and education to understand a whole range of questions relating to how human and animal bodies work. Photo: Kenneth Rodrigues

Poultry production surge for Aussie Pumps



Aussie's King Cobra 5000psi jetter for clearing blocked drains.

AUSSIE Pumps has been supporting Australia's poultry industry for 30 years.

During that time, it has developed machines for keeping the sheds clean and the birds healthy.

Aussie Pumps chief engineer John Hales said: "With ABARES forecasting poultry meat to rise by 3 percent in 2024-25 to record highs of 1.545 million tonnes, we can see the pressure is on for productivity improvements and lower production costs."

This positive outlook is good news for shed manufacturers and other associated industries, including Aussie's self-priming centrifugal wastewater pumps and its range of high-pressure cleaning equipment.

The Scud is the trick

When Aussie Pumps launched the Scud pressure cleaner almost eight years ago, it took the market by storm.

The sculpted stainless-steel frame, heavy-duty gearbox-driven 'Big Berty' Bertolini pump and Honda 13hp electric-start petrol engine changed the way people thought about cleaning sheds and routine maintenance.

As shed sizes increase, so too does the need for a stricter cleaning regime – involving high-pressure water blasters almost surgical in design.

The Scud features make it perfect for operation in big purpose-built sheds, designed to meet the demand for poultry meat.

This is a reflection of consumers substituting chicken for beef and lamb, predicted to drive production even higher.

Long-range cleaning

Aussie Pumps recently added a stainless-steel hose reel, with up to 50m of hose, as an option for big machines.

Even the Aussie Ultra, a class A pressure cleaner that delivers 20LPM at 4000psi can have this option.

It provides the operator with a range of 100m, without having to move the machine during the cleaning process.

"It's not a way of controlling avian influenza but cleanliness in all senses is going to be increasingly important for poultry meat and egg producers," Mr Hales said.

Aussie jetter to clear blocked drains

Aussie's King Cobra 5000psi jetter is a bargain for any poultry operation.

The machine is powered by a Honda GX630 23hp twin-cylinder electric-start petrol engine.

It is a neat package in a stainless-steel frame that can either be trolley or vehicle mounted.

"Born out of our experience with plumbers clearing blocked domestic sewer lines, we found the Aussie King Cobra class A machine enables operators to be able to clear blocked drains easily and hygienically," Mr Hales said.

"Clogged up drains are a health hazard.

"Diseases coming out of those drains are to be avoided at all costs, especially in the poultry industry."

For operators using pressure cleaners who haven't been through the free safety training program, scan the QR code below.

The Aussie Pumps Safe Operator Training program has been a huge success in Australia and overseas.

Further information on Aussie's poultry protection package is available from aussiepumps.com.au or call 02 8865 3500.

Scan for the Safe Operator Training program.

Why humans kill animals – Part 5 – Delving into and discussing the ten reasons

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animal sacrifice traditions.

Nevertheless, landmark cases brought to the US Supreme Court may permit the practice of ritual animal killing in the US under their constitutional provision of religious freedom – a freedom not supported in Europe.

These examples illustrate the widespread use of animal sacrifice in ancient and modern cultures in all areas of the world and the diverse expression of the practice across different communities.

However, animals are also ritually killed for reasons other than worshipping a deity.

For many, the animal sacrifice is itself constitutive of interspecies kin relations, and the spectacular act of violence at the heart of the sacrifice (as an example, the beheading of the sacrificial animal) is crucial to the constitution of kin solidarity between the human sacrificer and animal victim.

Not all cultural killing of animals is for religious reasons or involves sacrifice.

Feasts, where special foods such as 'the fatted calf' or unusual quantities of food are served, can be for socio-political purposes without sacrifice but accompanied by rituals associated with the killing of the animals to serve at the feast.

Exotic cooked flesh can be used to welcome or impress guests, establish or maintain prestige, power or face, or accompany initiations into a society.

Gatherings of people to benefit from superabundances of food, such as migratory or seasonally abundant animals (for example fish migrations, see also reason 1), are often culturally linked to phenological signals and associated ceremonies.

As examples, ceremonies of food availability, harvesting and use prescriptions were, and are, ritually enacted and celebrated by First Nations peoples in Canada and Australia, and bat harvesting festivals are annually celebrated in northeast India.

It might be argued that humans do not need to kill animals for purely cultural or religious reasons, and there are indeed some noteworthy examples of rapid cultural change to avoid animal killing.

However, we suspect that many people will still feel so deeply about the issue that it could be described as a need, and denigration or suppression of those religious and cultural needs might be considered bigotry, epistemicide or cultural imperialism.

Expression of the very idea that proper or more developed religions are superior to primitive barbaric religions is typically divisive, racist and deeply rooted in colonialism.

Though the practice of animal sacrifice will remain subject to criticism by some people, it is likely to continue except where it is prohibited by law.

Thus, many cultural and religious practices will continue to require the killing of animals and cannot be easily substituted with practices that do not require animal killing.

10. Research, education and testing

Killing animals for research, education and testing purposes is treated separately here because of its unique reasoning.

However, it might also be thought of as an extension to, or component of, many of the other preceding reasons for animal killing by humans (reasons 1-9), given that animal research is often conducted to support our understanding and implementation of those other reasons.

Animals are used in scientific and medical research and education to understand a whole range of questions relating to how human and animal bodies work, what causes diseases in humans and animals, or attempts to develop therapeutic and cosmetic treatments that are safe and effective.

Many, if not most, of the remarkable innovations in our medical understanding and treatment of contemporary human maladies have been at least partly derived from research using animals.

The use of animals for research, education and testing is typically highly regulated to ensure such use is justified on ethical and welfare grounds.

Millions of animals are used each year in research and education (for example dissection, vivisection and veterinary training).

However, adherence to Russell and Burch's 'Three Rs' principle – replacement, reduction and refinement – is now a requirement of most, if not all, legislated and self-regulated national surveillance systems to ensure this use of animals is justified.

The replacement of animals in research has occurred mainly through improvements in techniques, which enable scientists to look for mechanisms of action at the cellular and molecular levels rather than using a 'whole animal' approach.

Most national systems of animal research oversight also require reductions in the use of animals where possible, directing that animals should only be used when no other method is available to meet the scientific aims of the study.

The refinement of techniques has resulted in less harm and fewer animal deaths in experimental procedures.

Refinement not only improves the lives of research animals but it can also improve the quality of the science.

One obvious way to improve animal welfare while using animals for research or education purposes is to create an environment that meets the animals' specific needs.

To this end, Mellor and Reid developed the 'Five Domains Model' – originally based on the United Kingdom Farm Animal Welfare Council's 'Five Freedoms' – to assist in identifying welfare impacts under the following domains: nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental state.

While the implementation of Russell and Burch's 'Three Rs' principle and Mellor and Reid's 'Five Domains Model' have contributed enormously to the responsible use of animals in scientific research, the use and killing of animals for research and education cannot be easily eliminated outright.

This is partly because animal experimentation is often intended to identify ways to reduce harm to animals.

For example, the effective development of mammal trapping devices used by researchers and trappers involves the implementation of stepwise protocols to minimise pain and suffering and ensures a thorough assessment of traps with a minimum number of animals.

Without such state-of-the-art research protocols and ongoing refinement of techniques, traps used in the field may cause otherwise avoidable pain, suffering and death to millions of animals.

Humans do not need to kill animals for research and education purposes, though refraining from this endeavour will undermine our ability to improve animal welfare and minimise animal killing in the future.

For example, the animal welfare impacts of agricultural killing practices (reason 3) may not improve if we cease researching ways to reduce harm to killed animals, or the harms associated with threatened species conservation efforts (reason 6) may not improve if we cease researching ways to increase reintroduction success.

In the absence of a universal ethic for animal experimentation, concerned scientists and non-scientists alike have plotted different courses of action, while recognising that animal researchers have a role to play as moral stewards of their research animal subjects.

Many medical schools have eliminated their live-animal labs or have reduced the number of healthy animals used for surgical practice and experimental procedures.

Alternatives to the use of live or dead animals, such as interactive three-dimensional computer models, video footage and life-size plastic models, can be as effective as traditional methods in some cases.

In contemporary contexts, the scientific community and the public need to integrate critical thinking with the scientific method to continually identify necessary and unnecessary animal-based studies, which is presently achieved and managed through various national codes of practice.

Animal researchers and educators must also ensure that published research involving animals meets the highest standards for the use and treatment of animals.

Conclusions

Killing animals occurs in multiple ways for multiple reasons and, though some forms of killing are not essential for human existence (for example, recreational hunting and mercy killing), the overall necessity of animal killing is an unavoidable ecological reality.

Animal killing by humans is also a behaviour consistent with our predatory and competitive ecological roles within the global food web.

We invite others to build on the discussion we have initiated here, and encourage respectful comment and further discussion.

Ben Allen
University of Southern Queensland


Associate Professor Benjamin Allen, research co-author and wildlife management and research team leader at the Institute for Life Sciences and the Environment at the University of Southern Queensland. Photo: Michelle Hutchinson Photography

Extending layer hen lifespan

■ Studies in the context of the Australian egg industry

EXTENDING the lifespan of egg-laying hens would contribute to decreasing the size of the national flock and the use of limited resources, increasing the sustainability of the Australian egg industry.

For extension of flock life to be economically viable, aspects of hen management including hen feed efficiency, eggshell quality and hen health need consideration.

To this end, some recent Australian studies of brown-egg producing hens in longer laying cycles have been undertaken.

Overall, smaller-sized hens at point of lay that gain small increments of weight through to mid-lay consume less feed, are more feed efficient with good bone health and more favourable liver function throughout a longer laying cycle compared to larger sized hens.

Eggshell quality in older hens benefitted when a more nutrient dense diet was fed in the early laying period.

The transferability of these outcomes into cage free egg production systems in Australia should be evaluated.

Introduction

With ongoing genetic selection for improved persistency of lay and feed efficiency in laying hens, the egg industry is pursuing the opportunity to extend layer hen lifespan until they are 100 weeks of age, with an aim for each hen to produce up to 500 eggs.

This presents some challenges for the hen as, during this longer laying cycle, she will be producing more than 31kg of egg product and using approximately 1kg of calcium to produce up to 3kg of eggshell.

Continuous egg production places high demand on the organs and tissues involved in producing eggs.

This includes the liver, which generates yolk lipid, and the oviduct, which produces the egg white, shell membranes and eggshell.

Further, the continuous demand for Ca for eggshell formation may impact bone integrity, especially the risk of bone fractures and osteoporosis.

However, recent reports have not found a direct relationship between continuous egg production and bone quality.

Eggshell quality is central to the production of first grade eggs and is a key determinant for the flock to continue through a longer laying cycle.

Optimal liver and skeletal health are also critical for the successful extension of flock life.

Recent Australian studies that have explored hen characteristics, productivity, FE, egg quality, liver health and bone health in longer laying cycles will also be discussed.

Egg production and feed efficiency

The transition of a pullet from rearing into egg production presents many challenges.

This includes the stressor of transportation from the rearing to the laying facility and acclimatisation to the layer shed.

During this transition, it is ideal that the hen continues to grow and then starts to lay eggs.

In Australia, layer pullets are typically reared to above-breed standard weight at point of lay.

This is practiced as larger pullets appear to manage the transition to the laying shed more readily than lighter-sized hens, and they start to lay eggs of a larger size at an earlier age.

However, heavier hens have higher nutritional needs and hence higher feed intake.

There is also a greater risk of a drop in egg production during peak lay if their nutritional needs are not met.

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Dr Wendy Muir

Treatment	BW 70 wk (Kg)^	BW 90 wk (Kg)	Cum. FI 18-69 wk (Kg)	Cum. FI 18-89 wk (Kg)	Cum. eggs/hen 18- 69 wks	Cum. eggs/hen 18-89 wk	Cum. FCR 18-69 wks	Cum. FCR 18-89 wks
BW (18woa)								
HW	2.20	2.23	42.7	58.4	348	470	2.09	2.14
LW	1.99	2.01	39.7	53.5	343	463	2.03	2.10
DND								
HND#	2.10	2.12	41.1	55.4	346	465	2.04	2.11
LND	2.09	2.11	41.4	56.5	346	468	2.08	2.12
Interaction								
HW*HND	2.22	2.25	42.5	57.9	348	465	2.08	2.16
HW*LND	2.18	2.20	43.0	58.9	349	475	2.09	2.12
LW*HND	1.98	1.99	39.6	52.9	344	465	2.01	2.07
LW*LND	2.00	2.02	39.7	54.2	343	460	2.06	2.13
P- Values								
BW	< 0.001	<0.001	<0.01	<0.001	0.07	0.29	0.053	0.33
DND	0.63	0.78	0.48	0.29	0.98	0.70	0.18	0.85
BW*DND	0.42	0.31	0.65	0.86	0.82	0.31	0.47	0.21

BW(18woa): 18 weeks of age body weight; HW: Heavier weight; LW: Lighter weight; DND: Diet nutrient density; HND: Higher nutrient density diet (formulated on 90g FI/day; 2900 kcal/kg, 0.83% SID.Lys); LND: Lower nutrient density diet (formulated to 110g FI/day; 2725 kcal/kg; 0.74% SID.Lys); BW (Kg)^: body weight; Cum FI: cumulative feed intake; Cum eggs/hen: total number of eggs produced per hen;; Cum FCR: Cumulative feed conversion ratio as kg feed/kg egg mass.

Table 1 – ISA Brown hen bodyweight at 70 and 90 weeks of age and cumulative feed intake, number of eggs laid/hen and feed conversion ratio from 18-69 and 18-89 WOA.

Extending layer hen lifespan – studies in the Australian context

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The ongoing measurement of FI, egg production and egg mass throughout the laying cycle allows hen FE to be calculated.

Egg weight and egg quality

Egg characteristics, including the appearance of the yolk, albumen and eggshell, are a priority for the consumer.

Eggs classified as extra-large – where a carton of 12 eggs weighs 700g, with average egg weight 60g – is the target for most Australian producers.

Maintaining EW below 70g avoids increased egg losses due to cracked eggshells.

An EW of 60-65g accommodates market demand and eggshell quality.

Egg size typically increases with hen age.

Larger eggs contain a larger yolk and less albumen.

In Australia, a more golden coloured yolk – that is, ≥11 on the Roche colour scale – is preferred.

Albumen viscosity and quality calculated as Haugh unit also tends to decrease with hen age.

A HU of 82 is recommended throughout an 18–100 week egg laying cycle.

The shell of each egg requires approximately 2.2g of Ca.

To meet this requirement, Ca is sourced from both the hen's diet and her skeletal system.

There are several comprehensive reports on nutritional management for eggshell quality and specifically within the longer laying cycle.

As hen age and EW both increase, eggshell quality tends to decline, becoming thinner and more liable to cracks and fractures.

Concurrently, there is a reduction in intestinal uptake of Ca by older laying hens.

Eggs with ≤9.5 percent eggshell weight are more susceptible to breakage, whereas ≥10 percent eggshell weight will minimise cracks.

Typically, increased variability in eggshell quality with flock ages will determine when the flock will be terminated.

Liver and bone health

The liver processes starch, carbohydrate and fat to form yolk lipid, which also involves the production of hepatic fat.

When this process is disrupted or experiences an imbalance, fatty liver haemorrhagic syndrome may ensue.

Hens housed in cages and receiving high energy diets are most susceptible to FLHS.

Environmental and bird genetics may also predispose birds to FLHS.

In addition to abdominal and hepatic fat accumulation, severe or extensive acute liver haemorrhage can cause sudden death.

The impact of less severe chronic FLHS is more poorly understood.

Korver concisely described the continual recruitment and redeposition of labile Ca in the medullary bone deposits of the skeletal system for the formation of eggshell.

At night, when low dietary Ca intake coincides with eggshell formation, Ca may also be mobilised from structural bone.

This can occur even when there is ample medullary bone but, unlike medullary bone, structural bone is not replaced while the hen is in lay.

Loss of structural bone increases the risk of bone fractures and osteoporosis.

As hens age, bone density declines and bone porosity increases, which may be exacerbated with longer laying cycles.

Interestingly, recent studies have not found a direct relationship between high egg production, eggshell quality and bone integrity, suggesting that eggshell and bone quality may be managed independently through optimum nutrition and genetic selection.

Continuous high egg production has also been attributed to keel bone fractures.

These are most frequently seen in cage free systems but also occur in caged flocks.

The incidence of KFB has been reported to peak around 50 WOA, but KBF have been observed in more than 50 percent of hens in older flocks.

In addition to high egg production, age of first egg and hen inactivity have also been implicated with KBF.

Australian studies

As Australian egg farmers are interested in extending layer hen lifespan, there is a need to identify ways of extending the egg-laying cycle together with the production of saleable eggs.

This has been the objective of some recent studies funded by Australian Eggs.

Study 1

This study was designed to compare the performance of pullets of either above or below BSW when 18 weeks of age (former heavier weight HW and latter lighter weight LW) in a laying cycle that extended from 18 to 89 WOA.

As lighter-sized hens have innately lower FI, the experiment also included two early-lay dietary treatments.

This entailed a diet of higher nutrient density as a potential mechanism for the LW birds of lower FI to receive adequate nutrition as they entered lay, and a more common diet of lower nutrient density.

The HND diet may also be a primer for hens destined for an extended laying cycle.

Given the higher cost of HND diets, it was provided for seven weeks only, rather than the more common duration of production.

Individually housed LW and HW ISA Brown hens were allocated to one of the two early-lay dietary treatments.

These were a LND diet, formulated to 110g FI/day – 2726kcal/kg, 16.4 percent crude protein and 0.74 percent standardised ilea digestible Lysine, 2.54 percent crude fat – or the HND formulated to 90g FI/day – 2901kcal/kg, 17.63 percent CP, 0.83 percent SID and 4.92 percent CF – which birds received from 18-24 WOA inclusive.

From 25-39 WOA, all birds were fed the early-lay LND diet, followed by a mid-lay LND diet formulated to >110g FI/day – 2724kcal/kg, 16.0 percent CP, 0.70 percent SID, 2.53 percent CF – from 40-77 WOA.

Finally, when 78 WOA, all birds were moved onto a late-lay LND diet formulated to 110g FI/day – 2753kcal/kg, 16.2 CP, 0.73 percent SID, 2.5 percent CF.

This was fed until hens were 90 WOA, when the experiment concluded.

Observations when hens were 69-70 WOA and 89-90 WOA are presented.

The HW pullets at 18 WOA remained comparatively heavier with higher FI throughout the study (Table 1).

All birds gained weight between 18-70 WOA with comparatively smaller increases in BW until 90 WOA.

Despite this, HW birds continued to be notably heavier than BSW for age.

Lighter weight hens achieved BSW for age around 62 WOA and BW remained relatively stable to 90 WOA.

There is agreement that small increments of weight gain for LW hens are beneficial, with the latter recommending LW hens attain BSW for age during mid-lay.

Further, the gradual increase in weight of smaller-sized hens allows them to reach full maturity, with sustained egg production and FE.

Hen-day egg production was similar for birds of both BW groups, averaging 89 percent at 69 and 81 percent at 89 WOA, above breed standard rate for age of 84 percent and 74.4 percent respectively.

The total number of eggs produced were similar for all birds, averaging approximately 465 eggs/hen at 89 WOA (Table 1).

Cumulatively, LW hens had lower FI from 18-89 WOA, generating lower egg mass and lower, but not statistically significant, cumulative FCR compared to HW hens (Table 1).

This is in contrast with the significantly lower cumulative FCR of LW hens earlier in production at 18-24 and 18-69 WOA (Table 1) and 18-50.

Hence characteristics of FE with hen size observed during early lay were maintained until 69 WOA but became more variable later in lay.

O'Shea et al also identified that, compared to LW hens, heavier ISA Brown hens had higher FI and higher FE at peak and late lay.

Earlier studies in White layers also calculated superior FE in LW hens through to 84 WOA.

Comparisons of hen BW with FI by Leeson and Summers, and Parkinson et al, drew similar conclusions, determining that for each additional 100g BW a further 3.5g FI/day was needed.

The former also estimated a concurrent increase of 1.2g EW.

As continuous FI and egg production data was collected (Table 1), a simple cost-benefit comparison of cumulative FI with cumulative egg production across this extended 18-89 WOA laying period was possible.

Compared to LW hens, HW hens consumed an extra 4.85kg feed to produce an additional seven eggs.

Feed costs and returns on eggs will vary but at estimated cost of $512/ton layer feed and $0.14 return/first grade egg, the extra cost is approximately $1.48/HW hen.

In a 50,000 flock this is an additional $74,000 from 18-89 WOA.

Alternatively, to break even, each HW hen needed to produce an additional 11 eggs, or to consume only 1.91kg extra feed.

Diet nutrient density did not affect EW in older hens.

At 69 WOA, EW for all hens was above 60g and HW hens produced the largest eggs.

At 89 WOA, the heaviest eggs were being produced by HW hens that had received the LND (average 63.4g) and lightest eggs were from LW hens on the early-lay LND diet (average 60.8g).

LW hens on the HND early-lay diet generated an intermediate EW of 62.3g.

Egg quality was assessed on a focal group of hens at 66-70 and 86-90 WOA.

Yolk colour score decreased with age from 11 at 70 WOA to nine by 90 WOA.

Haugh units were generally high, including average 90 HU at 90 WOA.

Hens that had received the LND diet during early-lay had higher HU between 86-90 WOA.

Several studies have assessed internal egg quality in relation to hen BW and diet nutrient density, with varying results.

Interestingly, hens of higher FE and lower BW produced eggs with higher HU and higher amino acid concentration in the albumen, compared to less efficient heavier hens.

Neither hen size nor diet nutrient density altered eggshell weight.

At 66-70 WOA, shell weight was >10 percent and at 86-90 WOA >9.5 percent EW.

However, at both 70 and 90 WOA, hens fed the early-lay HND diet produced thicker and stronger eggshells than hens fed the LND diet.

Neither shell weight percentage, shell ash nor shell mineral levels provided an insight into the reason for the thicker and stronger shells.

At 70 and 90 WOA, FLHS scores were similar for all treatment groups.

However, at 50 WOA, FLHS scores and hepatic lipid peroxidase were lower in LW hens and hens that had received the HND diet during early-lay.

O'Shea et al also reported lower FLHS scores in LW and more FE hens at 45 WOA.

Liver lipid peroxidase did not differ at 70 WOA, but at 90 WOA, it was lowest in HW hens that received the LND diet and in LW birds that received the HND diet during early lay.

Keel curvature and bone breaking strength were similar across all treatments at 70 and 90 WOA.

However, higher levels of zinc and manganese were found in the bones of 90-week-old LW compared to HW hens.

Lower serum levels of both Zn and Mn have been observed in osteoporotic female patients, and hence their higher levels in LW hens are indicative of a lower likelihood of developing osteoporosis.

Overview of Study 1

Lighter weight hens demonstrated persistency of lay comparable to HW hens, together with more favourable liver health in mid-lay and bone mineral composition in very late lay.

They also maintained a lower FCR until late lay.

Feeding an HND diet in early lay increased eggshell strength in late and very late lay for all hens.

Study 2

As Study 1 illustrated that hen size trajectory is established by point of lay, Study 2 was designed to grow pullets to three different BW at 16 WOA.

Their egg production and egg quality are to be followed through to 100 WOA.

Using two lighting and three feeding programs during rearing either BSW or BW above and BW below BSW were attained.

Hy-line Brown chicks were grown in floor pens under two lighting and three feeding programs.

Lighting was either standard lighting of 10h/day from 7-16 WOA, or rapid step-down lighting of 9h light/day from 4-16 WOA.

From four WOA, pullets were either fed ab libitum or to achieve either BSW or 88 percent BSW – identified as Managed feeding – at 16 WOA.

At 16 WOA, the pullets were transferred to the Poultry Research Unit at the University of Sydney's Camden Campus and housed in individual pens in the

☛ continued P13

Body weight quartile at 92 wk	BW 92 wks (Kg)	FI 92 wks (g/d)	Rate of lay 92 wks (%)	Egg weight 92 wks (g)	FCR 92 wks (kg/kg)	Cum FI 17.4^- 92 wks (Kg)	Cum. eggs/h 17.4^-92 wks	Cum. FCR 17.4^-92 wks
Quartile 1	1.99[d]	106[c]	76[a,b]	61.9[b]	2.22[b]	57.6[c]	468[a,c]	2.17[b]
Quartile 2	2.20[c]	111[b,]	83[a]	62.8[b]	2.22[b]	59.9[b]	474[a,c]	2.18[b]
Quartile 3	2.35[b]	115[a,b]	78[a,b]	63.1[b]	2.25[b]	60.9[b]	463[b,c]	2.38[a,b]
Quartile 4	2.60[a]	119[a,]	70[b]	66.6[a]	2.50[a]	64.0[a]	448[b]	2.49[a]
P- Value	<0.001	<0.001	0.04	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.007	<0.002

BW (Kg)^: body weight; FI: feed intake; FCR: feed conversion ration as kg feed/kg egg mass; Cum FI: cumulative feed intake from 17.4 to 92 wks; Cum eggs/h 17.4- 92 wks: total number of eggs produced per hen surviving from 17.4 to 92 wks; Cum FCR: Cumulative feed conversion ratio from 17.4-92 wks calculated as kg feed/kg egg mass.
^ cumulative data is calculated from when pullets were placed on the early lay diet at 17.4 wks and before egg production started.

Table 2 – Hy-Line Brown hen body weight, feed intake, rate of lay, egg weight and feed conversion ratio at 92 weeks of age and cumulative feed intake, cumulative eggs per hen surviving and cumulative feed conversion ratio from 17.4 to 92 weeks of age.

To be economically viable, aspects of hen management including hen feed efficiency, eggshell quality and hen health need consideration. Photo by Alexas Fotos

Extending Australian layer hen lifespan

☛ from P12

layer shed.

There they received a pre-lay, early, mid and late-lay diet ad lib.

Lighting was stepped up from 11h/day at 16 WOA to 16h/day at 32 WOA, where it remained until hens were 100 WOA and the study concluded.

Pullet FI, BW at 16 WOA, age of first egg and weight of first three eggs was measured.

Hen performance, egg quality and hen health will be assessed through to 100 WOA, with data to 92 WOA being reported here.

The outcomes of the rearing phase were presented in these proceedings.

In brief, ad lib feeding under SL lighting resulted in the heaviest pullets at 16 WOA.

There was an interaction between feeding and lighting on age of first egg.

Ad lib fed pullets under RSD lighting were the first to lay and pullets on Managed feeding under SL lighting were the last to start producing eggs.

Weight of the first three eggs was independently affected by lighting and feeding where heaviest eggs were from SL lighting, BSW and Managed feeding.

At 92 WOA, birds reared under SL lighting were heavier than those reared with RSD lighting.

Pullets fed both ad lib and to achieve BSW at 16 WOA, were also heavier than Managed-fed pullets.

The average BW of all treatment groups at 92 WOA was >2.2kg, above 1.92-2.04kg BSW for the age.

This may be due to the individual hen housing with ready access to feed and water.

Average daily FI at 92 WOA ranged from 110-115g/d, whereas breed recommendation is 105-111g/d.

At 92 WOA, there were no differences in rate of lay, EW, FI, egg mass nor FCR due to treatments during rearing.

When reviewing the data, a range of hen BW within each treatment group was noted.

This indicates that managing feeding during rearing may not have an ongoing impact on FI and BW once the hens have ad libitum feeding.

Based on individual hen BW at 92 WOA the flock was divided into quartiles, ranging from lightest to heaviest BW – Q1-4 respectively.

Production data of the quartiles is presented in Table 2.

Quartile 1 had the lowest BW, which corresponded with Hy-Line Brown BSW for age.

Average BW increased with each quartile groups (Table 2).

Daily FI was lowest in Q1, and birds in Q3 and Q4 consumed significantly more feed/day.

Quartile 2 had the highest ROL (83 percent), which was significantly higher than Q4 (70 percent) and above 92 WOA breed recommended 71-73 percent ROL.

Quartile 4 birds produced the heaviest eggs (66.6g) (Table 2), above recommended 60-65g EW range.

Quartiles 1, 2 and 3 had significantly lower 92 WOA FCR than Q4.

Cumulatively 17.4-92 WOA FI was highest in Q4, lowest in Q1, while Q4 hens produced the least number of eggs.

Quartiles 1 and 2 had the lowest cumulative FCR, compared to Q4 (Table 2).

As in Study 1, a simple cost-benefit analysis based on BW quartile rankings in Study 2 was completed using the same estimated feed costs and return/first grade egg.

Comparing Q1 (lightest hens) with Q4 (heaviest hens), the latter consumed an additional 6.4kg feed to produce 20 fewer eggs to 92 WOA.

Quartile 4 hens had additional feed costs of $3.28/hen and lower return on eggs (-$2.80/hen), totalling an extra cost of $6.08/hen compared to Q1.

Quartiles 1 and 2 had similar and the lowest FCR.

Compared to Q1, Q2 hens produced six more eggs, an additional return of 0.84c/hen, for an extra 2.3kg feed, an additional cost of $1.18/hen.

Therefore, each Q2 hen cost an extra 0.34c to 92 WOA when compared to Q1 hens.

In a 50,000-hen flock, this is an additional cost of $17,000 from 17.4-92 WOA.

These findings to 92 WOA generally concur with the outcomes of Study 1 (to 89 WOA), and O'Shea et al between 70-75 WOA, in that LW hens are capable of sustained egg production but with a lower FCR compared to HW hens.

Conclusion

In Australian studies, lighter-sized hens at the start of lay have demonstrated strong persistency of lay, with lower FI and FCR through an extended production lifespan compared to larger-sized hens.

Gradual weight gain to mid-lay allows LW hens to reach mature body size, without being overly fat and with more favourable liver function and bone integrity.

Further, an early-lay diet of HND can improve eggshell quality, especially shell thickness and breaking strength in older hens.

These findings require further evaluation in cage free systems in Australia.

Thank you to Australian Eggs for funding Studies 1 and 2.

Dr Wendy Muir
University of Sydney

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Letter to the Editor

It is the responsibility of those making submissions to ensure the correctness of their claims and statements.
The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the publisher.

IN the words of Albert Einstein, "What is right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right."

Up until the late 1960s, most egg farms in Australia were small family-run operations.

Disease was still common, nonetheless its impact was minimal due to the small scale of production.

However, as cities and populations grew, so did the demand for eggs – leading to larger farms and increased disease risk.

In response, the government – Egg Board – guided by science at the time, recommended moving chickens off the ground and into cages to improve animal welfare and food safety.

The caged system was designed for large-scale production.

It allowed farms to expand to meet growing demand, while reducing mortality rates, lowering feed costs, improving production and making eggs more affordable for Australian families.

It also helped control disease and reduce the need for chemicals and antibiotics.

Science led us to adopt the caged system, and that science has not changed.

The agenda has.

Certain groups have become fixated on phasing out caged egg production while ignoring competing priorities – food security, safety, affordability and availability.

Avian influenza has now been reported in over 100 countries across five continents, resulting in the loss of more than 300 million birds worldwide.

And while AI is the most high-profile disease, it is far from the only one.

Other serious challenges, such as infectious bronchitis, infectious laryngotracheitis, fatty liver syndrome and salmonella enteritidis, all continue to impact egg production globally.

Australia's agriculture departments are doing an excellent job controlling disease outbreaks and managing infected sites.

Our farmers too are doing everything humanly possible to prevent disease and respond swiftly when outbreaks occur.

Yet amid all the reactive measures, one critical question is being overlooked.

Why are we seeing more disease outbreaks on egg farms now than we did a decade ago?

I may not have a degree in animal welfare, however I have over 50 years of hands-on experience caring for poultry across caged, barn and free-range systems.

And one thing is clear – it is time to stop ignoring the facts.

Caged egg production still has a vital place in our industry, just as barn and free-range systems do.

The recent outbreaks in Australia and globally only highlight the vulnerabilities of large-scale free-range farming, especially when done at volume.

In a recent article written by Dr Bidda Jones, she stated that caged egg farmers were driven by self-interest and were blaming free range farming for the problem.

The truth is that free range is not the problem… trying to farm in this system in volume is the problem, which Dr Jones supported in her article.

Dr Jones also mentioned the margins were more lucrative in the free range/cage free systems, hence the real reason for the push to phase out caged egg production.

The big supermarkets have made their decision not to sell caged eggs, but at the same time, they do not want their competitors having the supply of caged eggs.

In conclusion:

- Caged eggs provide a controlled environment that helps protect hens and maintain a stable safe egg supply especially in biosecurity outbreaks
- When it comes to the environment, caged egg farming has the lowest carbon footprint of all our farming systems
- Animal welfare debates will continue but at the end of the day, it is the consumer who decides – their values and choices shape our industry more than anything else
- Having all three systems – caged, barn and free range – gives consumers that choice while not sacrificing food affordability and food security in this country
- If you believe egg shortages will not result in imports, please look at what is happening around the world and read a report from Australian Eggs – scan the QR code.

According to Foodbank Hunger Report 2024, 3.4 million Australian households – about 32 percent – experienced some form of food insecurity in 2024, underscoring the widespread impact of rising living costs on food access.

Now is not the time to phase out an entire industry at the cost of everyday Australians.

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Scan for the Australian Eggs report.

The author responds to the recent letter to the editor from Dr Bidda Jones.

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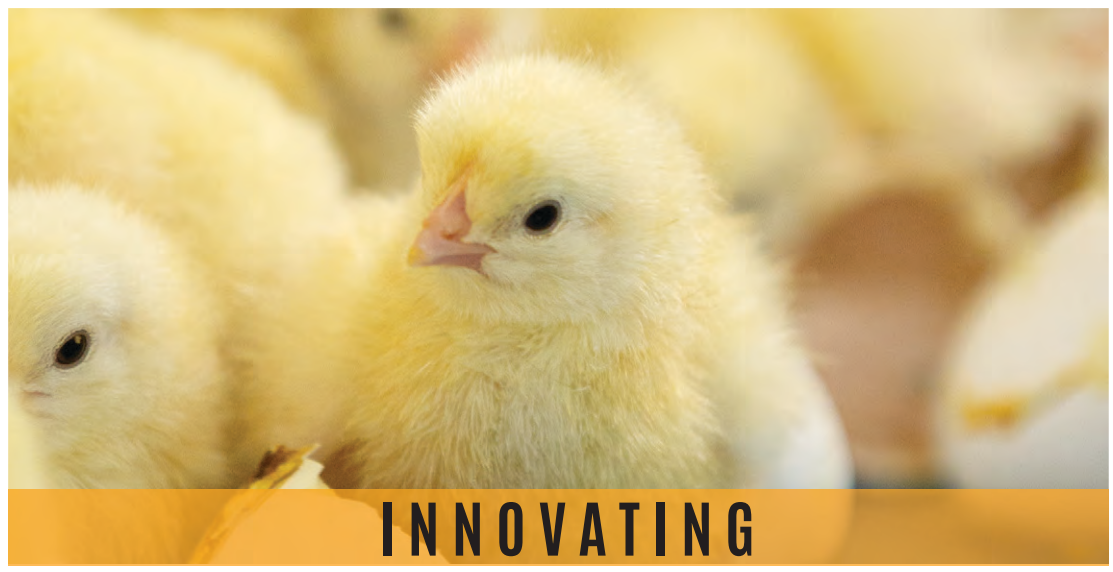

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