

Speech to Parliament

Julie Kos, Kossies Free Range Eggs, 2 March 2016

My name is Julie Kos, a free range farmer from Geelong, Victoria. I am also part of a growing farmer Network called Free To Roam Australia.

The past week I have been at Dubai, UAE with the Victorian government and Austrade, finding business to export our eggs. I find it fascinating that over in Dubai, they can't produce genuine free range eggs due to the harsh climate and not being able to produce pasture. So they are looking towards Australia, simply because of our vast greenland space, and clean environment.

When I am selling my product I start off by explaining that genuine free range farmers in Australia use a very sustainable farming method to produce our eggs, which I believe produces a much cleaner environment for our hens and in return a cleaner and healthier product.

True free range farmers, use a mobile shed system, so they can move the sheds frequently to put their chickens onto fresh pasture, unlike our other farmers whom also claim to be free range, whom use a static sheds. Batch after batch, whilst they clean the sheds out, they don't and can't remove the polluted soil from around the shed which becomes muddy and highly polluted and in a endeavor to solve this problem, some have even place rocks around the shed, which stops a chicken from being a chicken doing the things they love, by dust bathing and searching for insect and worms, way nature intended.

It has been said by the big egg produces that free range systems produce more diseases, and I would have to agree, in my opinion the large static shed with high density creates more stress on the birds and more chance of illness due to the build-up of manure under and around their sheds.

Our code of practice, states 1,500 birds per hectare, however the supermarkets have allowed 10,000 birds per hectare. I can tell you from personal experience, that there is no way that a farmer running at 10,000 birds per hectare can sustain pasture in the range and the only way to regrow pasture is to re seed and rest the range and it takes months for this seed to grow into beautiful lush grass, may I ask whilst their fields are replenishing what do they do with the hens, because if they let them out these young blades of grass would be dead or not existent within a week or so. Even running birds at 1,500, let alone 10,000.

Genuine free range farmers who let the birds have pastured range access every day, have resting paddocks and always do rotation. This is something the so called free range farmers cannot compete with.

We believe that animal welfare is also, the major concern in this debate of the labelling issue, in fact if we put money before animal welfare none of us would still be standing or fighting this fight. It was ok until, the supermarkets announced they were going stop the sale of cage eggs. Us genuine free range farmers, went from being the butt of the cage farmers' jokes to being their names sake, because they could let the birds out occasionally, call them free range and pocket a premium price for their egg! Ripping of the consumer under cutting real free range farmers, but in fact, most in my opinion were running more of a barn laid system, and have now been caught out and made accountable.

There is no way a mobile system, can financially compete with static sheds, of which all have in line systems, for collecting of eggs, for feeding, a much higher population in the sheds, sometimes 50,000 birds in a shed. Our mobile system range from a few to 2,500 and with the manual egg collection, moving of shed, supply of feed to shed, by hand or tractor, re-pasturing costs, and the massive amount of overheads in land, to stay viable we must dictate a higher price.

It is all these points which set us miles apart in production systems and I personally believe that us real Australian free range farmers - can't possible feed the masses by free Range alone, and each and every system has its pros and cons, all we want is for the government, not to take our label away from us, and clearly set out precise guidelines so in the end the consumers knows what they are buying and ultimately they will have the right to make their own educated and informed decision. This is the only way, most consumers Vision of birds running around on pastured paddocks every day, all day, will stay alive and operates as a viable and growing industry here in our own home Australia, the rest of the world is looking at us as using a superior "free range production system" Simply because we are the land of many Green pastures!

KOSSIES
GRAIN FED FREE RANGE EGGS