



Inquiry into the
Impact of Animal Rights Activism
On
Victorian Agriculture
Parliament Victoria

Victorian Farmers Federation –
Intensive Industries Group

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) – Intensive Industries Commodity

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Intensive Industries Group represents one of the commodities in the VFF, Australia's largest state farmer organisation and only recognised consistent voice on issues affecting rural Victoria. The Intensive Industries represents chicken meat growers, egg farmers and pig producers, and is pleased to respond to the much welcomed Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture. In providing a submission to this Inquiry we hope the outcomes will lead to meaningful legislative change and other measures that improve protections for Victorian intensive farmers.

Background – Intensive Industries

Intensive industry farmers care for their animals and are strong advocates of good animal health and welfare outcomes. Healthy animals and excellence in animal care promotes farming that underpins the production of high quality agricultural products in chicken meat, eggs and pork. Such high standards in animal welfare are vital to the livelihood of Victorian farmers.

The VFF represents 85% of the egg production in Victoria, with members who farm across all three egg production systems – cage, barn laid and free range. Our egg farmers are small to medium sized family businesses.

Victoria is a major pork producing state which contributed to around \$480M (value added) to the Victorian economy in 2015/2016, more than any other Australia state. The Victorian pig industry generates considerable economic activity, supporting over 3,000 FTE jobs in the state, making pig production a valuable industry to regional communities. The majority of Victorian pig producers belong to the VFF.

VFF represents approximately 85% of the chicken growers in the industry in Victoria, with the remainder being commercial chicken grower farms. The chicken meat industry is a significant component of Victorian agriculture contributing approximately \$400M annually to the Victorian economy. The two types of chicken meat farming systems are conventional (barn raised) and free range.

The VFF Intensive Industries supports all types of intensive farming systems, whether that be free range or conventional. Many of our intensive industry farmers are part of Quality Assurance programs such as APIQ, HenCare and RSPCA Approved Systems.

The RSPCA has developed animal welfare standards for chicken meat that set a high level of welfare for those animals in these farming systems. The majority of chicken farmers come under these RSPCA Approved Standards. These Standards are much higher than those recommended by the model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Poultry (*Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry*). Where the Standards are met and approved a farm may use the RSPCA logo on the packaging product from that farm. Consumers are then able to choose to buy these products, knowing that the animals have

been kept according to the RPSCA's high welfare standards. Approved farms undergo regular assessment (twice per year) to check compliance with the RSPCA welfare standards.

APIQ Certification (*Australian Pig industry Quality Assurance Program*) allows producers to demonstrate they meet legal requirements, industry standards and customer specifications. It requires producers to document procedures on-farm outlining how key tasks are carried out, monitoring the tasks, recording the results of those actions and checking that the results comply with the Standards. Part of the APIQ Certification gives consumers assurance that high standards have been met in regards to animal welfare, biosecurity and traceability, food safety and good agricultural practices in pig management.

Market Choices & the Right to Farm

Family owned and operated pig, chicken meat and egg farms comprise the majority of farming in Victoria, by number or operation. Many VFF intensive industries families have been proudly farming for generations, with the ambition of seeing this carried through to the next generation. As Australia's population increases, there is a growing need for farmers to produce more food, a basic economic principle of supply and demand. For example, there are more than 15 million eggs produced in Australia every day to meet the demand of Australian consumers. Approximately 44% (*data from Australian Eggs Annual Report 2017/18*) of all eggs sold in supermarkets are caged eggs – a farming system deemed as animal cruelty by activists. Caged eggs remain an important and affordable option for many Australians. Based on market forces alone consumers still want choice, an economical source of quality protein that egg farmers produce for the market.

Farming comes with a series of requirements. In the course of business, farmers balance the requirements of community/consumer demand, animal welfare and economic efficiencies. Governments and the majority of the community recognise the value of intensive industry farming for growing quality food for our domestic market, and the option of consumers having choice.

The concept of the 'right to farm' has multiple facets, however the common interpretation relates to a desire by farmers to undertake lawful agricultural practices without conflict or interference. There are various laws and regulations, such as POCTA that intensive farming producers are required to adhere to, to operate a lawful farming business in Victoria.

Farmers who are operating lawful businesses have a right to farm in peace without the threat of harassment, theft of animals or placing the welfare of their animals in jeopardy. It's a reality that many farmers and their families feel terrorised by activists. Farmers who live on site with their families, sometimes young children, are living in fear of their properties being invaded. A group of 70 activists storming your farming property at night, in close proximity to where your family is housed on site – this is not peaceful action, this is illegal and terrifying.

Animal Welfare Vs Animal Activism

Animal Welfare and animal activism are not the same. Animal welfare supports the belief that humans have a right to use animals, but also have a responsibility to treat them humanely. The VFF Intensives Group supports this belief and does not condone farmers who mistreat animals or compromise an animal's welfare. There are both state and federal laws to protect the welfare of animals. Positive animal welfare equals positive business outcomes. Not only is animal welfare important to both the community and farmers, it's critical for efficient and sustainable farming businesses. For example improving hen health and welfare represents a vital opportunity for productivity gains in egg production - healthy hens lay more eggs.

As with any democratic society, in our state various groups have a right to differing views. We understand and support this right to different views along with the right to demonstrate these views lawfully and without force and disruption to others. Animal Activism is a social movement with a philosophical view that animals have rights similar or the same as humans, and that people do not have the right to use animals at all. Our concern lies in how these organised groups demonstrate and impose their views in unlawful and disruptive ways. Publishing farmer details on the Aussie Farms map with the implication these farmers are acting unlawfully is not in the interests of animal welfare. Trespassing on a farm to remove animals is unlawful and not in the interest of the animals, in actual fact there is little regard for the welfare of the animals.

Animal activists storming a broiler chicken shed in 2018 on the Mornington Peninsula causing terrified birds (approximately 50,000) to stampede to the other end of the shed – risking injury and death to the birds is not animal welfare. Activists stopping a major intersection in Melbourne (Flinders & Swanston Streets) on 8 April 2019 caused significant disruption to the city – with emergency services unable to get through. These activities do not have the welfare of animals as a priority. It's about one group forcing their views of eliminating the use of animals and their products on a population who have consumer choice in our society. Their ultimate ambition does not appear to be about animal welfare, rather to have Australians on a completely plant based diet, and using plant based and synthetic products.

In the event footage has been captured through illegal raids on farms by animal activists, there is no sense of urgency for activists to inform authorities. Animal welfare is not their number one issue, it is capturing footage. For example if a pig producer finds out about another producer in breach of animal welfare regulations, they will inform authorities immediately as animal welfare is a significant priority for them.

Disease, Biosecurity & Unauthorised Activist Entry

On farm biosecurity is principally aimed at reducing the level of disease on farm. Disease can be brought on farm in a number of ways, the importation of animals, presumably asymptomatic of disease, or as fomites either mechanical brought on by farm visitors on their clothing or on the equipment or vehicles that they bring with them.

Of great concern is Avian Influenza (bird flu) contamination, due to activists spreading diseases by entering egg or chicken meat facilities, unchecked, without professional biosecurity clearances. The federal Agriculture department indicates a highly pathogenic Avian Influenza outbreak in Australia would have devastating effects on Australia's poultry meat and eggs industries, which contribute enormously to the Australian economy. There is an example from 2003 in the Netherlands where over 30 million birds were culled to eradicate the disease, costing over \$250 million. Based on the World Health Organisation, the outbreak also cost human illness and life, leading to significant economic and social impacts.

Another example is salmonella, where an outbreak of a rare strain of salmonella in Victoria occurred earlier this year. Authorities destroyed thousands of layer hens at the property along with making a massive supermarket egg recall. Incidents such as these take an egg farm up to two years to recover if all birds are to be culled. In addition, an all farm cull will most likely take a significant amount of eggs out the market, increasing the price of eggs by up to 40 cents a dozen, a cheap protein source for many Victorians that will be out of reach with such a drastic price increase. Salmonella pathogens may be spread extremely easily from an unauthorised person entering a contaminated farm, then going onto another farm.

Also of serious concern for our country is the threat of African Swine Fever (ASF) for pigs. Although Australia's border controls have managed to cease products from entering our country successfully, there is still the risk this disease may enter our farms through animal activists who breach a farm's biosecurity protocols. With a world class quality assurance program the Victorian Pig Group take biosecurity extremely seriously. Many pig farms require their staff to 'shower in' and change into supplied clothing and footwear to minimise the biosecurity risk.

The overall aim is to reduce the impact of the disease on production and animal health. This reduction of disease has the effect of reducing the reliance of antimicrobials for treatment of disease. The higher the levels of biosecurity, the greater the risk involved with visitors, and the stricter requirement of visitors to control the risk they bring with them. The inevitability of increased antibiotic use is the increase in antimicrobial resistance and therefore an increased risk that antimicrobial resistance bugs will enter the human food chain.

Animal activists who invade farms do not follow biosecurity protocols upon entry. The belief of dressing up in costumes to act as protective clothing does not act as a biosecurity measure, or prevent a potential disease transfer. Following unauthorised entry, farmers need to monitor the health of their pigs, meat chickens or layer hens. For instance there is immediate concern about different strains of E.Coli which can impact the health of a pig herd and can cause sudden death due to activists potentially transferring diseases onto the property. The biosecurity risk is significant, most likely a group of animal activists have been in contact with other animals.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) released statements last year that antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest threats to global health, food security and development today. Even with stringent biosecurity measures in place, if these measures are being

ignored by unauthorised visitors, there is a bigger picture at play here – the threat to public health.

Penalties

With increasing trespassing activity occurring in Victoria, the current laws are simply not a deterrent for animal activist trespassing on farming facilities. The VFF Intensive Industries Group recommends a strengthening of current Victorian penalties. NSW are set to introduce significant fines in August 2019, escalating to possible prison time. Under the NSW Biosecurity Act, trespasses who illegally enter farms will receive an ‘on the spot’ fine, with fines graduating for individuals, groups and corporations.

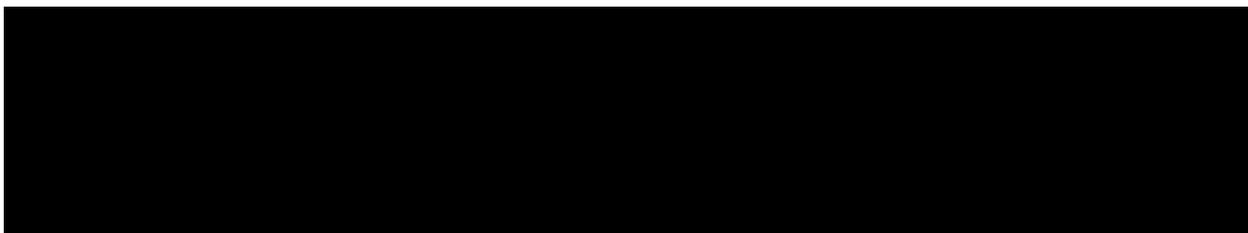
Final Comments

The VFF Intensive Industries Group understands the right for various interest groups to express views in a peaceful and lawful way. Our concern rests with the disruptive and unlawful nature these views are being demonstrated in Victoria. We hold animal welfare as a priority in farming and support the legislation that underpins this. We do not condone any form of animal cruelty.

Unauthorised farm entry that breaches biosecurity protocols brings a significant risk of introducing and spreading infectious disease. The inevitability of increased antibiotic use sees the increase in antimicrobial resistance and therefore an increased risk that antimicrobial resistance bugs will enter the human food chain. The World Health Organisation has released statements last year that antibiotic resistance is one of the biggest threats to global health and food security. The disease risks of unauthorised farm entry cannot be underestimated.

Finally, we strongly recommend the introduction of increased penalties in Victoria for illegal trespass activity. A meaningful deterrent needs to be introduced to prevent unlawful activity, allowing farmers to operate their businesses without fear.

Yours sincerely



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