

# Major welfare issues & research needs for the Australian egg industry

Animal welfare Science Centre  
farm animal research planning seminar  
DPI Victoria, Attwood

5 December, 2008



# Egg Industry Vision statement

*“A cohesive, profitable and growing Australian egg industry meeting the needs of consumers while operating in a socially and environmentally sustainable fashion.”*

# AECL strategic 'platform'

## AECL VISION

A RESPONSIBLE AND PROACTIVE INDUSTRY SERVICE PROVIDER SUPPORTING THE AUSTRALIAN EGG INDUSTRY TO ACHIEVE ITS VISION



## AECL Mission Statement

To develop and drive integrated on-farm, through chain and market services – through R&D and promotional levy investments – that maximise benefits and revenue for the Australian egg industry and the community while minimising barriers and costs for Australian egg producers.

## STRATEGIES & OUTCOMES

↑  
AECL  
Strategic Plan

↑  
AECL  
Strategic Plan

## AECL CORE OPERATING 'PILLARS'

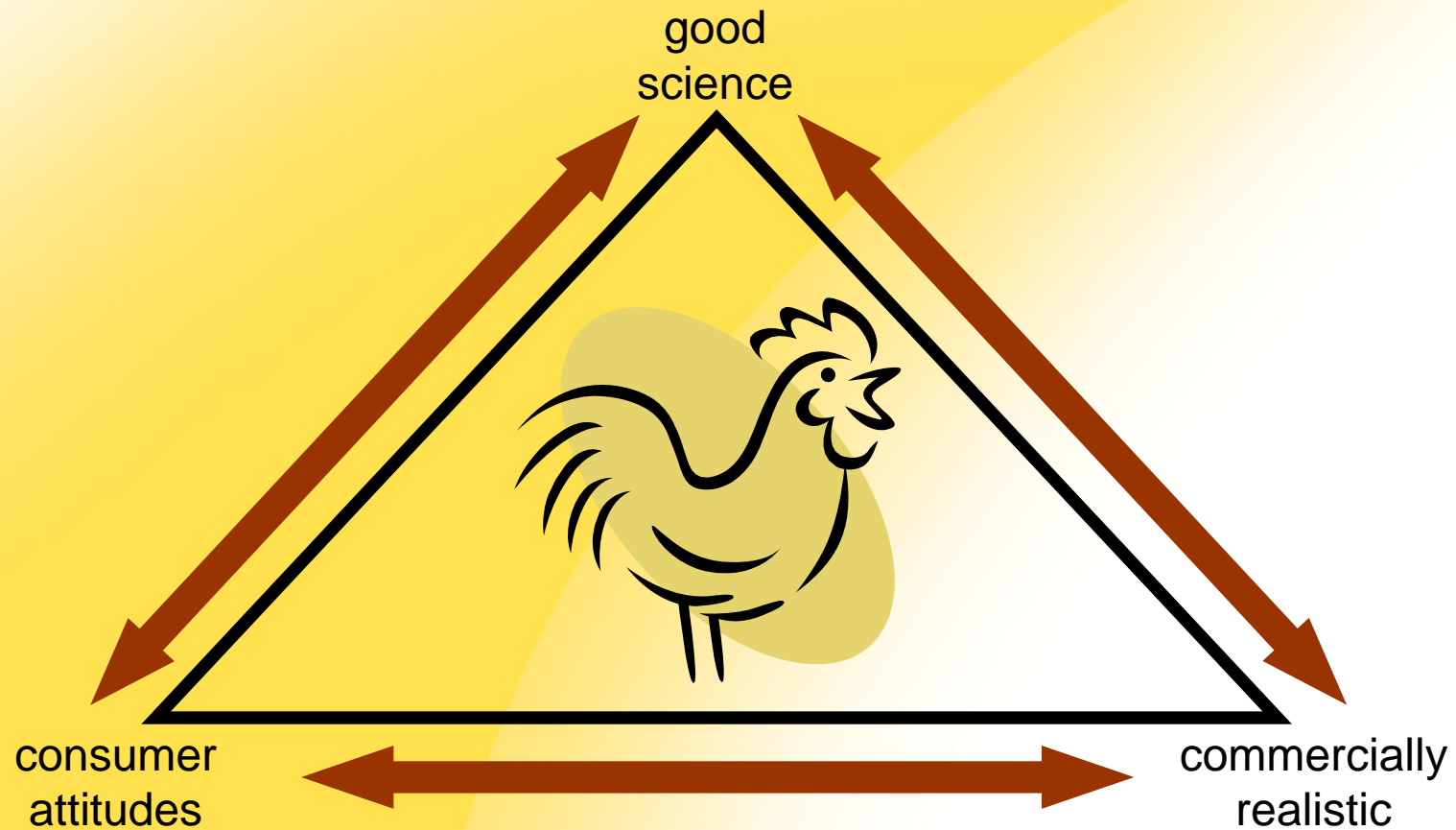


# Animal welfare policy?

- 🥚 Animal welfare policy should be dictated by:
  - 🥚 Good science – peer reviewed and replicated objective assessment of the impact of management on flock welfare, factual rather than emotional evaluation
  - 🥚 Consumer attitudes & demands
  - 🥚 Commercial reality



# 'tensions' between welfare platforms



# Hen Welfare Advisory Group

- Panel of independent animal welfare, veterinary and egg industry advisors.
- Guide research & communications from AECL on animal welfare with respect to egg production in Australia.
- Members:
  - Dr Clive Jackson, BVSc PhD  
Veterinarian and Research Scientist
  - Prof Paul Hemsworth BAgSc (Hons) PhD  
Director, Animal Welfare Science Centre
  - A/Prof John Barnett PhD  
Stress Physiologist and Principle Scientist, DPI Victoria
  - Mr Phillip Szepe  
Egg Producer, Kinross Farm Pty Ltd



# EggCorp Assured (ECA)

- The national egg quality assurance program
- HACCP based
- Independently audited annually with 'spot' audits
- Production hazards include:
  - Animal health & welfare
  - Biosecurity & on-farm quarantine
  - Food safety
  - Environmental management
  - Product labeling



CERTIFICATION TM  
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AUSTRALIAN EGG  
CORPORATION LIMITED



# Conflicting welfare priorities?

- Relative importance of good health and manifestation of normal behavioural repertoire.
- “It may never be possible to provide an ideal system because increasing the opportunities for behavioural freedom (for example) may unavoidably increase the risk of transmission of certain diseases, or the risk of injury”*

LayWel, 2006





# A balancing act...

What about the **science**  
or any **research**?

## CONSUMER DEMANDS

Produce eggs that are:

- Responding to the perceptions & requirements of consumers.
- True-to-name & definitions by complying with agreed standards.

## COMMERCIAL REALITY

Produce eggs that are:

- In sufficient quantity to cater for growing markets.
- Efficiently produced.



# Egg industry – hen welfare R&D

- 🥚 The Australian egg industry has committed ~ \$2 million to welfare research (8 projects):
  - 🥚 Comparative welfare across housing systems
  - 🥚 Welfare in furnished cages
  - 🥚 Improving moulting & beak trimming practices
  - 🥚 Physiological stress assessment
- 🥚 An investment of ~ \$3 million on poultry health and disease management research.
- 🥚 Core partner of the Australian Poultry CRC funding welfare-based research through one of three key research program areas.
- 🥚 AECL is keen to participate in the CRC re-bid.



# Hen welfare – key issues

- 🥚 Research on welfare should be placed into context:
  - 🥚 Objective versus subjective research & assessment.
- 🥚 Further research is required to establish the relative importance of particular behavioural needs, specifically in cage systems...
- 🥚 Behavioral needs must be considered in relation to physiological, health and production indicators of welfare.
- 🥚 Hen welfare is highly dependant on levels of animal husbandry and not confined simply to issues of housing systems.
- 🥚 Key welfare priorities:
  - 🥚 Evaluate welfare issues and develop strategies that address identified problem areas and enhance layer hen welfare.
  - 🥚 Identify objective measures of layer hen welfare.
- 🥚 Increased research into free range hen management.



# Hen welfare – key issues

- 🥚 Continued research into husbandry practices as it relates to all recognised egg production systems:
  - 🥚 Beak trimming
  - 🥚 Male culling
  - 🥚 Moulting
  - 🥚 General bird management
- 🥚 Cages & cage size – restriction of “normal” behaviour:
  - 🥚 Objective assessments
- 🥚 Social research into the appropriate names, definitions and suite of standards that characterise today’s egg production systems.

