

Good flock husbandry

Keeping each flock of hens healthy and productive is the main focus of every chook farmer. Proper management helps to reduce disease and other problems.

We move our mobile sheds **at least** once a week so there is no build-up of manure under the sheds – this has the double benefit of fertilising the paddocks and ensuring that the hens are always on fresh pasture.

Intestinal parasites and worms can be a major problem on farms - generally as a result of damp ground or litter in the hen house which encourages the development of the little parasites. Most farms simply throw chemicals at the problem.

At Freeranger Eggs, we don't use chemical control measures. We would only do so if there was a major problem with a flock – which so far hasn't happened – and veterinary advice told us that was the only option.

External parasitic infestation such as ticks, lice and mites cause irritation and stress to the birds, which can cause a drop in egg production, so it is well worth keeping ahead of these issues.

There is no magic about it, internal and external parasites can be controlled effectively by good management. Providing clean water, keeping sheds and nest boxes clean and providing quality feed to the hens is a great starting point. We put aromatic herbs such as Wormwood, Rosemary and even gum leaves in nest boxes. Diatomaceous Earth is also sprinkled in nest boxes and a slurry of Diatomaceous Earth is used on perches to control mites in the chook sheds. Diatomaceous Earth and Cider Vinegar is added to chook food every two months or so to control worm infestations.

Moving the sheds regularly, cross grazing with sheep, cattle and horses helps to break the worm burden cycle – and resting sheds and paddocks between each flock is a vital part of what we do. Usually paddocks are rested for four to six months before a new flock is introduced. The sun is a great sanitiser.

Phil Westwood

Freeranger Eggs