

Egg farm sustainability and carbon footprint

At Freeranger Eggs we agree with statements made by the Australian Egg Corporation that eggs have a lower carbon footprint than any other source of protein, but there is no evidence to back assertions that cage egg production is more carbon friendly than free range production.

Grain consumption, energy inputs and transport costs are recognised as the main contributors to the carbon footprint of the egg industry. The Australian Egg Corporation claims that data prepared for it by consultants, using figures from three cage egg producers and one 'free range' operation, shows that free range egg production has a higher carbon footprint than cage production – but it does not disclose any facts to back up this assertion.

It says that the three cage farms used in the survey had a total number of one million birds but the 'free range' farm selected for this analysis had an unknown quantity of hens.

AECL has not revealed any information about the carbon footprint of the infrastructure on intensive farms – the hundreds of cubic metres of concrete, massive shedding, energy consumption etc. It has included some assessment of the costs of transporting feed grain, but the impacts of transporting eggs all over Australia have been specifically excluded from the analysis.

There is massive variability in farm practices which limits the value of the Egg Corp. study. Some farms grow and mill their own feed. Some only buy local grains while others bring in feed and some ingredients from interstate and overseas. Some farms only sell their eggs within a locally-defined region while others distribute nation-wide. Some farms generate their own power using renewable sources.

This project report took no account of those variables – but the consultants did acknowledge that more work needed to be done.

A two year sustainability study of free range egg farms in the Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority area (which included **Freeranger Eggs**) showed clearly that feed input costs were directly related to stocking densities. Supplementary feed requirements decreased with lower stocking densities as hens obtained more nutrients from the paddocks.

The major outcome from the nutrient balance figures in that study was that supplementary feed costs increased in direct proportion with stock density.

This table demonstrated the comparative feed inputs.

	Lay rate	Feed consumption	Stocking rate
Grantville	70%	26kg/hen/yr	9 DSE/ha
Labertouche	65%	35kg/hen/yr	30 DSE/ha
Poowong	80%	45kg/hen/yr	44 DSE/ha
Myrniong	65%	48kg/hen/yr	75 DSE/ha

At Freeranger Eggs, Grantville, with a stocking rate of 9 DSE (Dry Sheep Equivalent), supplementary feed input was just 26kg a year per hen - about 70 grams of feed a day. The data generated in the study demonstrated the cost efficiency of our farm activities. With a stocking rate of 75 DSE, supplementary feed input almost doubled to 48 kg – about 130 grams per day.