

Egg Industry

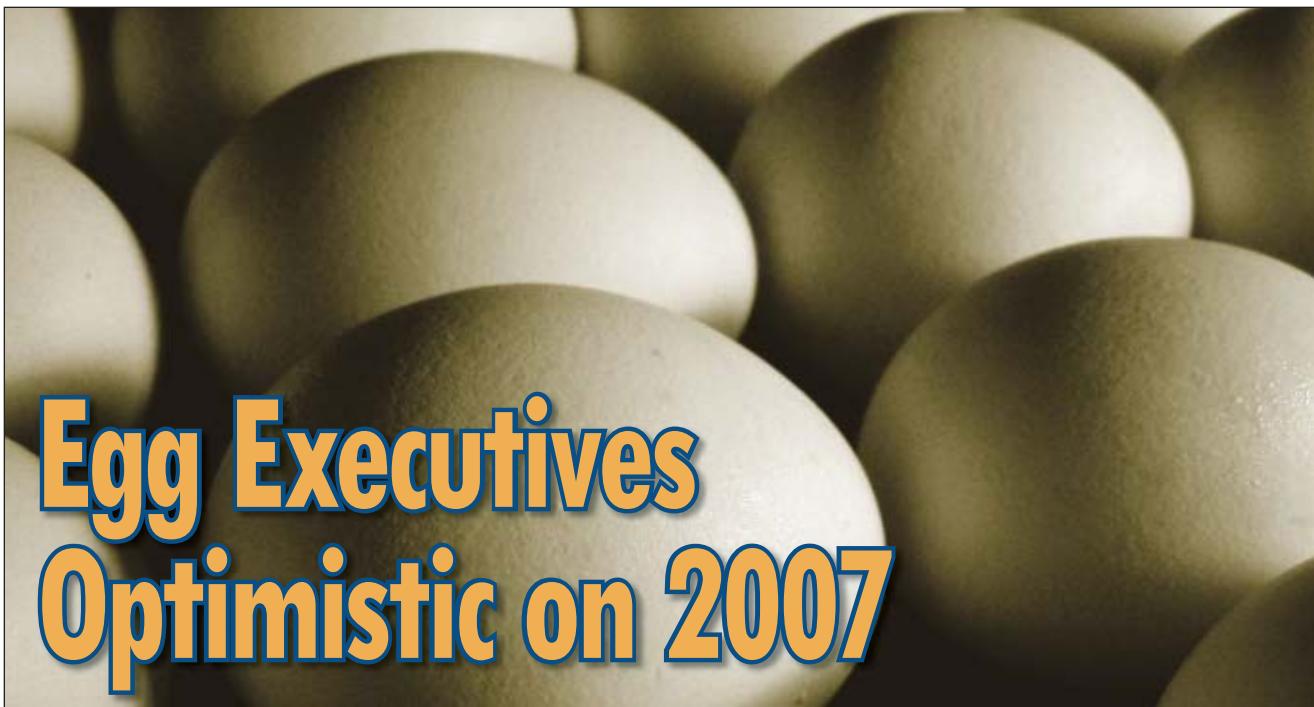
News for the Egg Industry Worldwide

February 2007/Volume 112 Number 2

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By Edward Clark, Editor

Following two years of red ink, most egg industry executives are optimistic that 2007 will be a profitable one. One key reason why: high corn prices due to strong ethanol demand that has encouraged companies to hold the line or cut layer numbers.

"The last three months have been profitable and there is no reason to

think it will not continue," says Larry Seger, president of Wabash Valley Produce, Dubois, Ind. He noted that in late January, the Urner Barry price in the Midwest was \$1.21/dozen for shell eggs, within 15 cents of all-time highs. He estimated prices for the entire month would be close to \$1.10 to \$1.15, more than 30 cents higher than previous-year levels.

High grain prices have encouraged

the industry to match egg supply with demand, he says. "People have to look long and hard at putting up a 2 million bird complex when they don't know if corn prices are going to be \$2.50 or \$7/bu.," Seger says.

Expansion: "Not Now"

"When I sit down with my brothers and look at expansion, we say no, not now, and it's due to ethanol," Seger says. "The macro picture we're having to look at is what the national energy policy is going to be," he says. He notes that there are 100-some odd ethanol plants in existence with more being planned that will take anywhere between 2 billion to 5 billion bushels of corn. The big question, he says, is whether the nation continues with its drive to energy self-sufficiency, re-

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ardless of what happens to crude oil prices. "We're having to make decisions we've never had to make before and I've been here 35 years."

No one wants to pay \$4/bu. for corn, but, ironically, "we always do better with high-priced corn," says Marcus Rust, an owner of Rose Acre Farms, Seymour, Ind. "Bankers don't want \$4 corn fed to chickens," he says.

Current corn prices in the \$4/bu. range add about 8 cents per dozen per day over 2005 and most of 2006 costs, and high feed costs "always lead to more profitable egg prices," says Gene Gregory, the new president of United Egg Producers, Atlanta. It seems like it should be both the opposite, he says, "but with lower grain prices, producers hold their hens to an older age. When feed prices are high, people get rid of hens sooner." In addition, he adds, echoing the views of egg company executives, "high grain prices slow down expansion."

One action Seger and some others say they will do in response to the almost unprecedented run-up in feed prices is to use forward pricing tools to do more hedging.

More Than Exports

Even though two large export orders have been made by United States Egg Marketers, of which Seger is the chairman, he says it's incorrect to credit those orders as being largely responsible for the recent increase in egg prices.

While the second order that occurred in January was substantial, 60,000 cases per week, they were equal to only 1.5% of U.S. production over the

four-week period that they occurred. "The exports were important, but other things were happening. We (the nation) were producing fewer eggs," he says. Layers have been sold off, and "retail

northwest operations for Valley Fresh Foods, Woodburn, Ore., says that he is "cautiously optimistic that we can stay at profitable levels." He notes that egg prices have shot up substantially, but

▶ In late January, the Urner Barry price in the Midwest was \$1.21/dozen for shell eggs, within 15 cents of all-time highs.

sales have been good."

It isn't clear just how high-priced grain will affect egg sales, Rust says. Eggs are one of the cheapest protein sources, so \$4/bu. corn could possibly help egg sales overall, he says, but it's possible that specialty eggs sales will be affected. With high-priced feed driving up all protein sources, some consumers could opt for regular instead of specialty eggs due to their cheaper price, he notes.

Not all egg producers are optimistic on 2007, however. David Thompson, president of Pearl Valley Eggs, Pearl City, Ill., acknowledges that while there is "some temporary profitability, I am not optimistic it will continue because of feed prices and too many eggs produced."

Thompson adds that high-priced corn is encouraging producers to investigate other feedstuffs. "It may very well alter what the birds are fed," Thompson says, noting that bakery byproducts, wheat midds, distillers dried grains, cereal fines, and other ingredients are among feedstuffs being considered.

"Cautiously Optimistic"

Mark Oldenkamp, vice president of

the post-Easter period "is the real question." In total, he looks for a profitable 2007, but probably not during summer months. That said, he notes that ethanol-driven feed prices are up 10 cents per dozen, and "ethanol appears here to stay." One opportunity for egg producers is to make use of futures options when they can lock in favorable feed prices. He says that in the West, bakery and corn screenings, wheat, and canola already are being used, "but we need to explore options more than before" with basic ingredients so high-priced.

Agreeing with other egg executives, he says that "when feed prices are high, we make more money, as producers are more inclined to keep supply and demand in balance." Oldenkamp adds that for those who have made the move, specialty eggs are less sensitive to swings in feed prices than traditional eggs are. His firm produces Eggland's Best and some brown eggs.

Reduced Flock Size

Bill Rehm, president of Daybreak Foods, Lake Mills, Wis., notes that there has been a fairly significant reduction in the nation's flock size—286 million birds projected for 2007 versus

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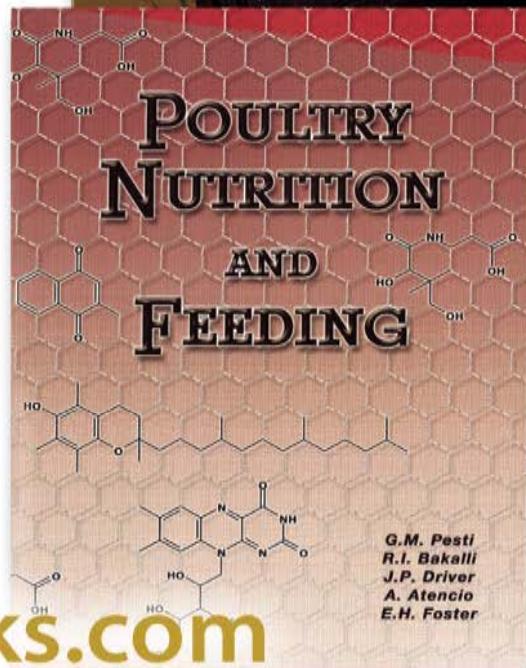
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Egg Executives Optimistic on 2007

290 million in 2006. “We are profitable now, but whether the reduction keeps prices higher remains to be seen,” he says.

Rehm adds that there is a significant increase in demand for liquid eggs. The key reason why, he says, is the “huge discrepancy” in prices for table

Producer’s animal welfare program that most shell egg producers participate in.

Agreeing with others that \$4 corn is more likely to keep supply and demand of eggs in tighter balance, he says “we will face red ink faster when the market drops and that should get produc-

Rehm continues that there are no great, cheap feed buys out there, because everything rises based on the price of corn. Even distillers’ dried grains, a byproduct of corn ethanol production, have been increasing along with corn prices, he notes.

Impact on Demand

Will substantially higher egg prices hurt consumer demand? Rehm and most others interviewed for this report don’t think so. “I tend to think that consumers will buy eggs whether the price per dozen is 70 cents or \$1.70,” Rehm says. He adds that eggs are like milk, products with inelastic demand, that is, unrelated to price. It’s different with T-bone steaks, he says. “When consumers see high prices on T-bones, they say, ‘maybe I’ll do something different tonight.’” Gregory agrees: “Whether eggs are 39 cents or \$1.25 per dozen, consumer purchases are the same.” **EI**

“I tend to think that consumers will buy eggs whether the price per dozen is 70 cents or \$1.70.”

—Bill Rehm, Daybreak Foods

eggs versus breakers. In late January, table eggs were priced at \$1.27, while eggs sold for breakers were not even half that, 51 cents. As a result, “anyone with the ability to put eggs into a carton was doing so,” he says.

The widening of the price differential, he says, is due to the United Egg

ers to match supply with demand so we don’t lose so darn much money all the time.”

Rehm says the only exception to egg prices not increasing when feed prices did was 1988. He adds that his company’s hedging strategy hasn’t changed, it’s just that the price levels have.



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▶ INDUSTRY NEWS

▶ Report Could Nix U.K. Egg Merger

A provisional conclusion by Britain's Competition Commission casts doubt on whether the merger of the nation's two largest egg companies will be allowed to stand.

The commission says that the completed merger of Clifford Kent Holdings Ltd., the parent company of Stonegate Farmers Ltd., and Deans Food Group Ltd., through the creation of a new company, Noble Foods Ltd. would reduce competition in key markets for shell and liquid eggs, leading to higher prices for retailers and other customers.

Inquiry chairman Barbara Mills said in January that the merged company would be in a notably strong position, accounting for over half of both sales of shell eggs to retailers and the supply of liquid eggs. Customers' ability to switch to alternative suppliers would be much reduced as a result of the merger, she said, with po-

tential competitors unable to provide the required volumes due to their small scale in relation to Noble. In addition, Mills said, many liquid egg customers stated that powdered eggs do not represent a suitable substitute.

The Competition Commission is required to publish its final report by Feb. 27.

▶ Wegmans May Sell New York Egg Farm

Wegmans Food Markets, Inc., Rochester, N.Y., reportedly is considering the sale of its egg farm. Local press reports say a regional producer has contacted Wegmans about the Wolcott, N.Y., facility.

According to ProgressiveGrocer.com, Wegmans confirmed that it and the egg producer were in talks, but no timetable was set for a deal.

Animal rights activists broke into the farm in 2004, and videotaped conditions inside for a documentary, but a member

of the group was convicted of trespassing and received a six-month jail sentence. An investigation of the farm by the state and Wayne County uncovered no evidence of abuse. Wegmans says the potential sale has nothing to do with the controversy related to the farm of 750,000 layers.

▶ Nebraska Firm to Pay \$1 Million Fine

M.G. Waldbaum Co., a subsidiary of Minnetonka, Minn.-based Michael Foods Inc., has agreed to pay a \$1.05 million fine to resolve allegations that the company violated the Clean Water Act. Last month's settlement involves a large egg processing facility and seven associated poultry farms near Wakefield, Neb.

The company provides liquid eggs to companies such as Pillsbury, Hellmann's, Mrs. Smith's, Ben & Jerry's, Hostess, and Kraft, in addition to selling

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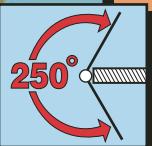
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shell eggs to retailers.

The violations concern allegations of overloading the wastewater treatment lagoons at the City of Wakefield's publicly owned treatment works, discharging pollutants from a large pile of poultry waste into Logan Creek without a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit (NPDES) at its Husker Pride poultry concentrating animal feeding operation (CAFO), and improperly dumping process sludge water from its egg processing facility at two of its other poultry farms rather than spreading on the ground in accordance with state standards.

As part of the settlement, Waldbaum has committed to comply with a schedule in its current NPDES permit for construction of a wastewater treatment plant to treat the effluent from its egg processing facility. Construction of the new plant will be completed in 2009 at an estimated cost of \$16 million.

► British Scientists Develop Anti-Cancer Eggs

Scientists in Britain say they have developed genetically modified chickens that lay eggs containing proteins necessary to create anti-cancer drugs.

Scotland's Roslin Institute has produced five generations of chickens that

can cheaply produce proteins for the development of lifesaving cancer drugs in eggs. According to the BBC, some of the chickens had been modified to lay eggs containing miR24, an antibody with the potential to treat skin cancer. Others produce human interferon b-1a, which can stop viruses from replicating cells. **EI**



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What the Crystal Ball Foretells

Expect more consolidation, continued challenges on animal welfare and the environment, and high feed costs over the next three to five years.

By Edward Clark, Editor

As egg industry executives look deep into their crystal balls for what is ahead for producers over the next few years, five key trends stand out:

1. Consolidation is set to increase, due, in part to the growth in size of end users who will demand egg companies large enough to serve their needs;

2. An increasing number of egg companies will band together to form cooperatives, both as a way to effectively compete with large egg firms by creating organizations that collectively market, as well as to buy inputs such as Styrofoam in large quantities;

3. Feed costs are expected to remain high, due to ethanol demand for an increasing volume of corn that livestock producers and corn exporters will have to compete against;

4. Animal welfare and environmental challenges will only continue. There is a real possibility that caged production could be outlawed in some states with small numbers of egg producers. Particularly vulnerable will be producers with caged production systems in states that allow measures to be put before citizens in referenda; and

5. On the consumer demand side, the growth in demand for specialty eggs will only continue in the years ahead, and eggs packed with more nutrition and health benefits could well boost consumption among some key population groups.

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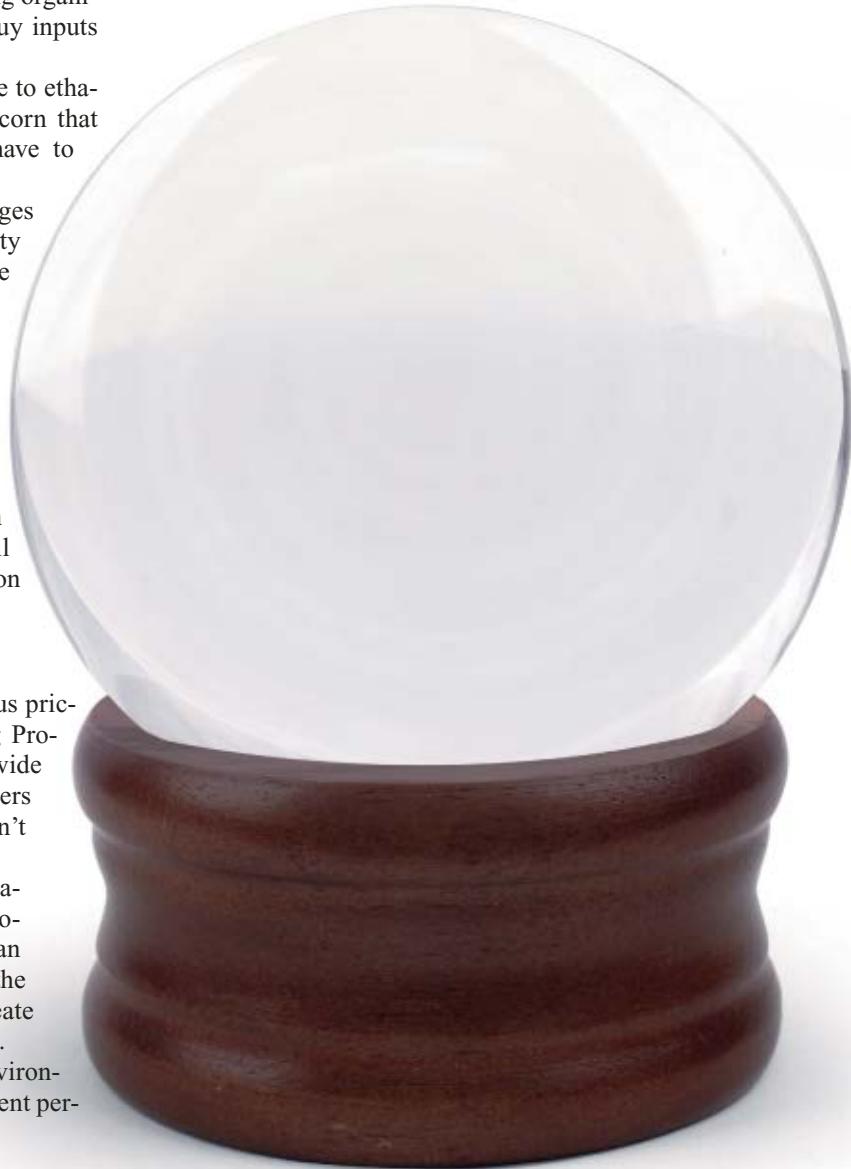
An additional trend is the move to more cost-plus pricing, says Gene Gregory, president of United Egg Producers, Atlanta. “The retail market doesn’t like wide price swings,” he says. “They don’t mind producers making money, or even a high price, but they don’t like wide swings,” Gregory adds.

Will the egg industry find a way to avoid gyrations between profit and loss? Not likely, in Gregory’s view. “The industry has not proven that it can balance supply and demand,” he says, and it has the ability to boost egg supplies rather quickly that create times of surplus and accompanying low egg prices.

One major issue producers now face is the environment—both from air quality and manure management per-

spectives—but he is optimistic that the industry will be able to find solutions over the next few years so egg producers can avoid being subject to excessive regulations.

The industry will continue to be challenged on the animal welfare front, Gregory says, noting that three states—New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Arizona, have bills introduced into their legislatures that would ban caged egg production. “This issue is very, very serious, and it is likely that caged production will be banned in some states.” Most likely, he says, would be for bans to occur in liberal states with little



“You can’t have all table eggs and all eggs for egg products produced in-line.”

—Larry Seger, Wabash Valley Produce

or no egg production. “It would be difficult (for such a measure to pass) in Iowa,” he says.

Gregory notes that 25 states have referendum, and it would be easier for opponents of caged production to win on a ballot initiative than in the legislative process, where the egg industry has an opportunity to defend itself. He thinks the strategy of caged layer opponents is to pick off easy states first, then with victories in hand, approach states more difficult for them to succeed in.

On both environmental and animal welfare issues, it’s important for the industry to fund scientific studies to find solutions, and then for the industry to follow scientific guidelines, says Bill Rehm, president of Daybreak Foods, Lake Mills, Wis.

Is the U.S. More Export Competitive?

Coming off two back-to-back export orders by United States Egg Marketers that have played a role in boosting prices, is it possible the United States can become more export competitive in the future? Not likely, Gregory says. “We export less than 2% of production, and I don’t see that changing very much. More countries are setting up barriers all the time.” He adds that the recent sales to Europe occurred, in part, due to the weak U.S. dollar versus the Euro, and the price of products in Europe.

However, Marcus Rust, an owner of Rose Acres Farms, Seymour, Ind., sees the possibility that high-priced grain could make U.S. eggs more competitive in some markets as it may become more cost effective to import the end product than to import grain to feed to chickens.

One issue several industry executives mentioned that will have to be resolved over the next few years is the dramatic increase in the percentage of in-line production on the egg products side that now approaches 50% of the total. The rate of increase cannot con-

tinue at recent levels, says Larry Seger, president of Wabash Valley Produce, Dubois, Ind. “You can’t have all table eggs and all eggs for egg products produced in-line,” he says. Seger notes, for example, that over the Christmas holi-

days, shell egg prices went up, while egg products declined in price.

David Thompson, president of Pearl Valley Eggs, Pearl Valley, Ill., says that at the same time there will be more consolidation in the industry, “people will band together in co-ops and sell products as a group. There is no need for us to be butting heads all the time.” What Thompson doesn’t see a lot of over the next few years “is a lot of expansion. People have been burnt pretty badly over the past few years.” **EI**

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Does Egg Demand Have a Bright Future?

By Edward Clark, Editor

To Larry Seger, president of Wabash Valley Produce, Dubois, Ind., “the future of egg consumption is bright. We’ve been getting a lot of good press, and we’ve overcome a hurdle. The medical community has done an about-face.”

But to David Thompson, president of Pearl Valley Eggs, Pearl Valley, Ill., “consumption is falling off somewhat. Increased breakfast offerings have

helped us, but it hasn’t been enough to offset the decline.”

One problem, Thompson says, in the Chicago market that he serves, is that eggs are virtually never put on sale, so consumers do not have the incentive to stock up on them.

“We need to do a better job telling our story,” Thompson says. “The American Egg Board and the Egg Nutrition Center (ENC) are doing a great job, but they

need more funding. Eggs are such a great value, but we need to get the word out. We need to blow our own horn more.”

Don McNamara, ENC executive director, says there are reasons to be optimistic on the future of egg use over the next three to five years, however, in light of several studies in the works.

Egg Group Controls Weight

First, he says, are studies that show

Up, Down, Now Up Again: 50 Years of Per Capita Egg Consumption

Year	Number		Farm weight ¹		Retail weight ²			
	Total (Millions)	Per capita G/B (Number)	Total (Mil. lbs.)	Per capita I/B (Pounds)	Total (Mil. lbs.)	Per capita K/B (Pounds)	Total (Number)	Per capita M/B (Number)
1946	54,456	385.2	7,125	50.4	6,840	48.4	52,278	369.7
1947	55,572	385.6	7,271	50.4	7,053	48.9	53,905	374.0
1948	58,032	395.8	7,593	51.8	7,365	50.2	56,291	383.9
1949	57,372	384.6	7,506	50.3	7,281	48.8	55,651	373.0
1950	59,364	391.4	7,767	51.2	7,534	49.7	57,583	379.6
1951	61,152	396.4	8,001	51.9	7,761	50.3	59,317	384.5
1952	61,224	390.1	8,010	51.0	7,770	49.5	59,387	378.4
1953	60,540	379.4	7,921	49.6	7,683	48.1	58,724	368.0
1954	61,044	375.9	7,987	49.2	7,747	47.7	59,213	364.6
1955	61,344	371.2	8,026	48.6	7,785	47.1	59,504	360.0
1956	62,004	368.6	8,112	48.2	7,869	46.8	60,144	357.5
1957	61,920	361.5	8,101	47.3	7,858	45.9	60,062	350.7
1958	61,620	353.9	8,062	46.3	7,820	44.9	59,771	343.2
1959	62,268	351.7	8,147	46.0	7,902	44.6	60,400	341.1
1960	60,312	333.8	7,891	43.7	7,654	42.4	58,503	323.8
1961	60,252	328.0	7,883	42.9	7,646	41.6	58,444	318.2
1962	60,780	325.8	7,952	42.6	7,713	41.4	58,957	316.1
1963	59,964	316.9	7,845	41.5	7,610	40.2	58,165	307.4
1964	61,008	317.9	7,982	41.6	7,742	40.3	59,178	308.4
1965	61,116	314.5	7,996	41.2	7,756	39.9	59,283	305.1
1966	61,632	313.6	8,064	41.0	7,878	40.1	60,214	306.3
1967	63,900	321.6	8,360	42.1	8,170	41.1	62,449	314.3
1968	63,516	316.5	8,310	41.4	8,125	40.5	62,100	309.4
1969	62,760	309.7	8,211	40.5	8,030	39.6	61,379	302.8
1970	63,341	308.9	8,287	40.4	8,107	39.5	61,967	302.2
1971	64,355	309.9	8,420	40.5	8,240	39.7	62,984	303.3
1972	63,604	303.0	8,321	39.6	8,147	38.8	62,268	296.7
1973	61,118	288.4	7,996	37.7	7,831	37.0	59,853	282.4
1974	60,520	283.0	7,918	37.0	7,757	36.3	59,291	277.3
1975	59,602	276.0	7,798	36.1	7,642	35.4	58,410	270.4

people who eat eggs for breakfast are able to control weight better than those who eat a bagel for breakfast. The egg group, McNamara says, consumes fewer calories at lunch. And just concluded, he says, is a study at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, La., that shows that when people are fed eggs for breakfast four days a week, they are better able to stick on a low-calorie diet, because they feel less deprived. An additional study, he says, will try and determine whether people who lost the weight can keep it off, which is always the issue with weight-loss regimes.

Another study, McNamara says, is at Tufts University in Boston, which is trying to determine the possible role

eggs can play in improving concentration, along with improved school performance and less classroom disruption, of school children.

Choline Benefits

In addition, McNamara says, choline has been incorporated into the list of essential nutrients by the National Academy of Science, because choline is needed for brain development and brain function. This benefits eggs, he says, because two eggs contain 80% of the daily recommended amount of choline.

Previously reported is the positive role eggs can play in protecting eyes from ultraviolet light, and thus macular degeneration, the leading cause of irreversible blindness. Lutein has been

shown to be more absorbable from eggs than plant sources.

“In today’s society, consumers are looking for fast, convenient, and healthy,” McNamara says. He sees the possibility to make egg products with added lutein and vitamin D that are homogenized that people can take home and pop into a pan. In his view, eggs could be designed for the elderly, for athletes—with added vitamin B, and other groups—that could be in pint liquid egg cartons. What’s prevented liquid egg products from taking off, in his view, are issues of shelf life and the fact that there is no branded name on liquid egg products, two hurdles that can be overcome. In McNamara’s view, “there is a market out there for it.” **EI**

Up, Down, Now Up Again: 50 Years of Per Capita Egg Consumption

Year	Number		Farm weight ¹		Retail weight ²			
	Total (Millions)	Per capita G/B (Number)	Total (Mil. lbs.)	Per capita I/B (Pounds)	Total (Mil. lbs.)	Per capita K/B (Pounds)	Total (Number)	Per capita M/B (Number)
1976	58,831	269.8	7,697	35.3	7,545	34.6	57,672	264.5
1977	58,809	267.0	7,694	34.9	7,546	34.3	57,674	261.9
1978	60,441	271.5	7,908	35.5	7,757	34.9	59,293	266.4
1979	62,240	276.6	8,143	36.2	7,991	35.5	61,076	271.4
1980	61,744	271.1	8,078	35.5	7,930	34.8	60,615	266.2
1981	60,808	264.4	7,956	34.6	7,813	34.0	59,714	259.7
1982	61,328	264.1	8,024	34.6	7,882	33.9	60,242	259.5
1983	60,972	260.2	7,977	34.0	7,839	33.5	59,917	255.7
1984	61,478	260.1	8,043	34.0	7,907	33.5	60,432	255.7
1985	60,849	255.2	7,961	33.4	7,828	32.8	59,833	250.9
1986	61,007	253.5	7,982	33.2	7,852	32.6	60,012	249.4
1987	61,618	253.8	8,062	33.2	7,933	32.7	60,632	249.7
1988	60,410	246.6	7,904	32.3	7,780	31.8	59,462	242.7
1989	58,622	237.0	7,670	31.0	7,552	30.5	57,725	233.4
1990	58,558	234.1	7,661	30.6	7,546	30.2	57,680	230.6
1991	59,034	232.9	7,724	30.5	7,608	30.0	58,148	229.4
1992	60,021	233.6	7,853	30.6	7,735	30.1	59,121	230.1
1993	60,815	233.7	7,957	30.6	7,837	30.1	59,902	230.2
1994	61,938	235.1	8,104	30.8	7,982	30.3	61,009	231.6
1995	61,916	232.3	8,101	30.4	7,979	29.9	60,988	228.8
1996	62,944	233.4	8,235	30.5	8,112	30.1	61,999	229.9
1997	63,943	234.3	8,366	30.7	8,240	30.2	62,984	230.8
1998	66,050	239.2	8,642	31.3	8,512	30.8	65,060	235.6
1999	69,751	249.7	9,126	32.7	8,989	32.2	68,705	246.0
2000	70,888	251.0	9,274	32.8	9,135	32.3	69,824	247.3
2001	72,032	252.5	9,424	33.0	9,283	32.5	70,952	248.7
2002	73,378	254.6	9,600	33.3	9,456	32.8	72,277	250.8
2003	74,032	254.4	9,686	33.3	9,541	32.8	72,921	250.6
2004	75,278	256.1	9,849	33.5	9,701	33.0	74,149	252.3

¹A dozen eggs converted at 1.57 pounds. ²The factor for converting farm to retail weight was 0.97 in 1965 and was increased 0.003 per year until 0.985 was reached in 1990. Source: USDA/Economic Research Service. Data last updated Dec. 21, 2005.

Get Ready for FDA's New Rule

By Dr. Simon M. Shane

The proposed FDA rule on prevention of SE (*Salmonella Enteritidis*), which will probably be finalized in 2007, will increase the frequency of assays to detect possible infection in flocks. The introduction of voluntary Egg Quality Assurance Programs (EQAPs) following the emergence of SE, the USDA-mandated post-harvest chilling of product coupled with use of pasteurized products and improved handling at the institutional and consumer levels, has reduced incident cases of SE in the United States.

A decline in outbreaks from a total of 81 in 1990 to a plateau of 30 since the early 2000s attests to the efforts of egg producers, food service and institutional operations. Unfortunately, progress in elimination of SE infection in consumers has stalled at a time when surveillance systems including FoodNet and advanced microbiological techniques have improved the capability to diagnose and record SE in patients.

Of the approximately 960 outbreaks involving 32,000 cases from 1975 through 2002, CDC was able to determine a vehicle of infection in 45% of the investigations. Of these, 79% were attributed to eggs or meals containing egg products. From 1992 through 1999, 76% of 202 outbreaks with a confirmed vehicle of infection were attributable to eggs or egg products. Accepting that 16% of SE infections which are diagnosed each year were acquired outside the USA, the FDA attributes a mid-range estimate of 66% of incident cases of SE in the USA to consumption of contaminated eggs.

The FoodNet database confirmed

an SE incidence rate of 2.32 cases per 100,000 of the U.S. population in 2002, indicating persistence of reservoirs in eggs despite the emergence of new vehicles. The CDC confirmed a relatively stable number of confirmed SE isolates from patients during the period 2000 through 2004, with annual values ranging from a low of 4,914 in 2003 to a high of 6,847 in 2000. The FDA calculates that there are approximately 120,000 incident cases of SE annually in the United States. Although this figure is subject to question since it incorporates numerical assumptions relating presumed and diagnosed cases, it is evident that SE infection persists in flocks in the Midwest and Western states and to a lesser degree, in the Mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes regions.

Status of EQAPs

Currently, various state and national voluntary programs cover between 60% and 70% of shell-egg production in the United States. The intensity of sampling varies among programs with the Pennsylvania EQAP the most rigorous. Many of the state EQAPs and the widely-followed United Egg Producers 5-Star Program require evaluation of the status of flocks by assay of drag swabs from manure two to three weeks before depletion (Figure 1).

depletion exposes consumers to the possibility of vertical egg-borne infection by transovarial or transoviductal transmission. Given persistence of infection on a typical 8- to 12-house in-line complex, hens will become infected shortly after transfer. There will be two peaks of excretion of SE, usually following onset of production during the first and second cycles.

Stress associated with initiation of egg-laying, climatic extremes or exposure to immunosuppressive or intestinal pathogens may activate proliferation of *Salmonella* in the intestinal tract with the possibility of systemic dissemination of infection to the reproductive tract in susceptible hens.

Sampling flocks within two weeks of depletion obviously absolves the producer of the need to take any direct action such as diversion of eggs to breaking and pasteurization in response to a positive finding. The long period between transfer and depletion after the second cycle effectively allows potentially contaminated eggs to enter the market.

The second problem with current SE surveillance systems relates to the inherent insensitivity of the drag swab assay under commercial conditions. Studies have shown that the moisture content of the manure beneath cages or in pits can affect the rate of recov-

Figure 1. Comparison of EQAP Surveillance Protocols

United Egg Producers "5-Star Program"	2 to 3 wks before depletion 2 drag swabs per row
Ohio, California and other State EQAPs	2-10 wks before depletion, manure pits
Pennsylvania EQAP	29-31 wks; 44-46 wks; 5-7 wks post-molt 2 drag swabs beneath each cage row

Delaying the first sampling age of layers to within two weeks before

ery of SE in addition to a number of operator and environmental variables.

Figure 2. Case Study on SE in an Eight-house, In-line Complex

Figure 2.1. History of SE Monitoring

Year	House# +ve	+ / Samples
2000	1 +ve	1/6
2001	Not done	—
2002	3 +ve	1/20
2003	All -ve	0/20
2004	2 +ve	1/24
2005 (Sept)	8 +ve	1/14

Figure 2.2. Directed Re-sampling, Nov 2006—Sampled each of six rows per house

House #8 (previously +ve)	1/8 rows +ve
House #5 (previously -ve)	1/6 rows +ve
Owner's Lab on split samples	All -ve

Figure 2.3. Structured Sampling, Feb 2006

Selected adjacent House #s 5, 6, 7, 8	
Samples:	
Drag swabs from each of 6 rows	
Pool of newly emerged flies	
Pool of swabs from louvers of 4 fans	
Pool of mouse droppings	

Figure 2.4. Results of Intensive Sampling, Feb 2006

House #	Age	SE-PCR Assay
5	99 wks	All samples -ve
6	68 wks	Fan pool +ve Rows, 1/6 +ve
7	36 wks	Mouse drop. +ve Rows, 2/6 +ve
8	49 wks	Flies +ve Rows, 2/6 +ve

Not all laboratories function in accordance with the approved NPIP enrichment and isolation protocol and SE isolation is at best dependant on technical and operator variables. In some instances, split samples of drag swabs sent to two different laboratories have yielded negative and positive results.

The National Animal Health Monitoring System Study conducted in 1999 showed that 7% of layer houses were infected with SE. More significant was the revelation that 13% of high-rise units tested positive. Published extracts from the NAHMS survey in peer-reviewed journals detail risk factors associated with infection

including rodent infestation, defective biosecurity and incomplete inter-flock decontamination.

The aim of SE surveillance is not simply to pass a test or to comply with the rules of a self-serving program. The objective should be for our industry to identify infected flocks and complexes and to take appropriate action to suppress as far as possible, the presence of SE in flocks and to reduce the risk to consumers. The various modalities including conforming to NPIP programs to ensure that SE-negative chicks are placed, vaccination, effective biosecurity, and rodent suppression are only part of the continuum which extends beyond farms to include appropriate

egg-washing and maintaining a cold chain from the point of production through to sale and implementing safe handling and preparation in domestic and institutional kitchens.

FDA Proposed Rule

The FDA has jurisdiction over aspects of egg production and distribution under both the Federal Food Drug and Cosmetics Act and the Public Health Service Act. The Proposed Rule relating to “SE Prevention Measures” issued in terms of 21 CFR Parts 16 and 118, closely follows the principles promoted by UEP. These encompass purchase of SE-free pullet chicks, biosecurity procedures, suppression of rodents, decontamination of infected farms and appropriate handling and storage of eggs. Environmental testing is regarded as the “cornerstone” of the program.

The proposed rule requires purchase of “U.S. S. Enteritidis Monitored” pullets, conforming to NPIP guidelines and regulations. Section 118.5(a) of 21 CFR will mandate assay of the environment of flocks, presumably by drag swabs, at 40 to 45 weeks of age and then 20 weeks after the completion of a molting program if the flock is retained for a second cycle. Combining the proposed FDA Rule with current industry practice, following the UEP “5-Star Program,” an integrated producer would assay pullet chicks (paper in boxes at delivery), pullets at 14 weeks, hens at 40-45 weeks, and finally, 2 weeks prior to depletion for single-cycle flocks. Second-cycle hens would be re-sampled 20 weeks after onset of production and approximately two weeks before depletion.

SE Case Study

The problem of insensitive detection is illustrated by the diagnostic sequence encountered by a commercial operation depicted in Figure 2. The history of the eight-house complex is shown in Figure 2.1, confirming isolation in four of the houses monitored over a six-year period. The infrequent pattern of sampling was determined following the EQAP, which required testing of a flock only two weeks before depletion, coupled with a benign indifference on the part of manage-

A decline in outbreaks from a total of 81 in 1990 to a plateau of 30 since the early 2000s attests to the efforts of egg producers, food service and institutional operations.

ment to monitoring for SE.

On review of the farm records including the positive result on one of 14 drag swabs from house #8, management was requested to repeat drag swabs on house #8 which was SE-suspect and on house #5, which was previ-

ously negative. Split samples collected in November 2005 were assayed by the owner's designated laboratory and also by a nationally recognized commercial reference laboratory.

The results as shown in Figure 2.2 confirm the presence of SE in 1 row

from each of the houses sampled, as assayed by one of the two laboratories. A structured sampling of four adjacent houses (#5-#8) was conducted in February 2006 (Figure 2.3), incorporating drag swabs from manure beneath cage rows, pools of mouse droppings, newly emerged house flies in the pits and dust from fan louvers.

The samples were subjected to a rapid specific SE Polymerase Chain Reaction assay and to conventional double enrichment bacteriological examination by a state diagnostic laboratory. The results as shown in Figure 2.4 confirm SE in various samples from houses #6-#8. There was general correspondence between the SE-PCR and conventional microbiological assays (results not shown) confirming the SE positive status of the complex. It is important to note the inherent insensitivity of drag swab sampling which yielded only 5 positives from 24 drag swabs. Submission of ancillary samples including flies, mouse droppings and dust from fan louvers obviously contributes to identifying positive houses and complexes.

Given the relatively low level of recovery of SE from a structured survey, it is evident that sampling individual houses on a complex at infrequent intervals will fail to recognize that the intestinal tracts of a high proportion of hens in the flocks on a complex are colonized with SE. Within the context of U.S. in-line units, especially those using deep pit housing and two-cycle programs, entire complexes are either free of SE or are contaminated.

It is impossible to prevent lateral dissemination of infection from older flocks to newly transferred susceptible pullets in adjacent houses. Movement of personnel and equipment, rodent migration and particulates entrained in air will inevitably spread SE throughout a complex given current U.S. production practices.

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It is erroneously held by many in the industry that SE is ubiquitous and a positive diagnosis is a function of surveillance intensity and diligent laboratory procedures. This contention is not supported by field experience. Following the intensive sampling on the subject farm, the same procedure was followed in March 2006 on a six-house complex with no history of SE on drag swabs extending back for seven years. There was no evidence of SE from the same set of samples and swabs as previously examined, in addition to egg belts which were assayed by the same state laboratory using both PCR and conventional microbiology.

Conclusions

The imminence of FDA surveillance requirements with increased frequency and rigorous procedures will detect currently unrecognized SE infection in cage-free flocks and in-line complexes subjected to "end-of-cycle" sampling programs. The consequences of detection of SE in currently "negative" flocks will be both financially severe and disruptive, given the powers to be exercised by the FDA and the tort system. The industry therefore should do all that is possible in the coming 12 to 18 months to anticipate intensified FDA surveillance and reduce the level of infection. This can be achieved by stringent control of rodents and especially mice, thorough decontamination between flocks and depletion of hens which are positive at the end of the first cycle, as these hens will serve as a reservoir of infection for the entire complex.

Additional research is required on vaccines and methods to improve their effectiveness. It is possible that immunosuppression during the early brooding period by Marek's and infectious bursal disease viruses compromise subsequent immunity to SE induced by vaccines. Industry practices such as administration of tetracyclines and tylosin to flocks in production affect the balance of intestinal flora and may predispose to proliferation of *Salmonella* in the intestinal tract.

During the past 10 years the industry has made consid-

erable strides in reducing the prevalence of SE infection. Perpetuating insensitive and infrequent surveillance protocols and applying deficient microbiological procedures have in all probability contributed to the plateau of SE infection in consumers. This has generated concern among public health authorities who are intent on eliminating shell eggs as a major source of SE infection. **EI**

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New World Inn & Conference Center, Columbus, Nebraska. Contact: Nebraska Poultry Industries, Inc., University of Nebraska, A 103 Animal Sciences, P.O. Box 830908, Lincoln, Nebraska 68583-0908. Tel: 402-472-2051.

12-15: Pacific Egg & Poultry Association Convention

Loews Coronado Bay Resort, Coronado, Calif. Contact: Pacific Egg & Poultry Association, 1521 I Street, Sacramento, California 95814. Tel: 916-441-0801. Fax: 916-446-1063. Website: www.pacificegg.org.

13-15: Midwest Poultry Federation Convention

RiverCentre, St. Paul, Minnesota. Contact: Lara Durben. Tel: 763-682-2171. Fax: 763-682-5546. E-mail: lara@midwestpoultry.com. Website: www.midwestpoultry.com.

13-16: Pacific Egg & Poultry Association (PEPA) Convention

San Diego, California. Contact: Pacific Egg & Poultry Association, 1521 I Street, Sacramento, California 95814. Tel: 916-441-0801. Fax: 916-446-1063.

April

22-24: Urner Barry's Executive Conference & Marketing Seminar 2007

Bellagio Hotel, Las Vegas, Nevada. Contact: Urner Barry, P.O. Box 389, Toms River, New Jersey 08754. Tel: 732-240-5330. E-mail: maryann@urnerbarry.com. Website: www.urnerbarry.com.

June

6-8: National Safety Conference For The Poultry Industry

Savannah Marriott Riverfront Hotel, Savannah, Georgia. Contact: Kristi Spivey, Food Processing Technology Division, Georgia Tech Research Institute. Tel: 404-894-3412. E-mail: kristi.spivey@gtri.gatech.edu.

July

8-12: PSA • ADSA • AMPA • ASAS Joint Annual Meeting

San Antonio, Texas. Contact: Poultry Science Association, 1111 North Dunlap Avenue, Savoy, Illinois 61874. Tel: 217-356-5285. Fax: 217-398-4119. Website: www.poultryscience.org or www.adsa.org.

October

3-4: National Chicken Council Annual Meeting

JW Marriott Hotel, Washington, D.C. Contact: National Chicken Council, 1015 15th Street NW, Ste. 930, Washington, D.C. 20005-2605. Tel: 202-296-2622. Fax: 202-293-4005. E-mail: ncc@chickenusa.org.

2008

January

23-25: International Poultry Exposition 2008

Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta, Georgia. Contact: US Poultry & Egg Association, 1530 Cooledge Road,

Tucker, Georgia 30084-7804. Tel: 770-493-9401. Fax: 770-493-9257. E-mail: expogeneralinfo@poultryegg.org. Website: www.poultryegg.org.

com. Website: www.midwestpoultry.com.

March

18-20: Midwest Poultry Federation Convention 2008

St. Paul, Minnesota. Contact: Midwest Poultry Federation, 108 Marty Drive, Buffalo, Minnesota 55313. Tel: 763-682-2171. Fax: 763-682-5546. E-mail: lara@midwestpoultry.com.

2009

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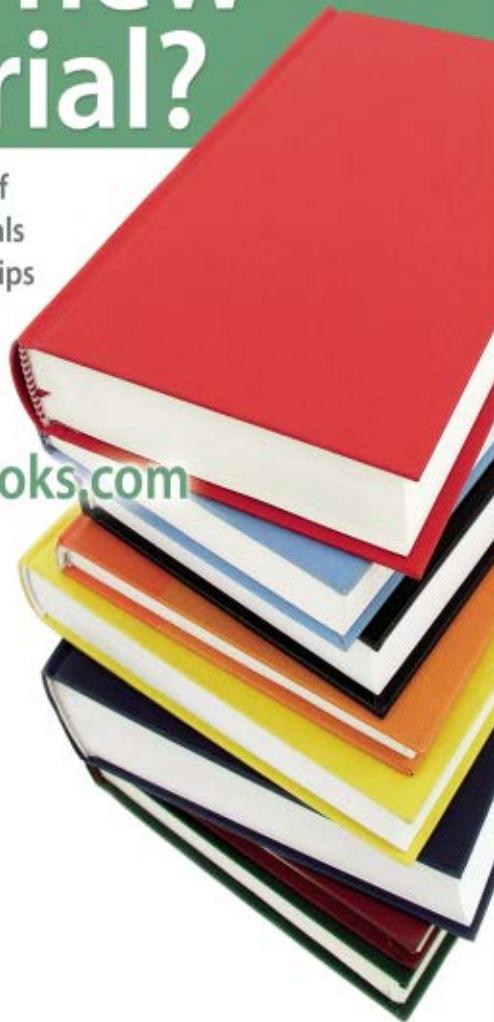
Georgia World Congress Centre, Atlanta, Georgia. Contact: US Poultry & Egg Association, 1530 Cooledge Road, Tucker, Georgia 30084-7804. Tel: 770-493-9401. Fax: 770-493-9257. E-mail: expogeneralinfo@poultryegg.org. Website: www.poultryegg.org.

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