

Egg Industry

News for the Egg Industry Worldwide

WATT

Inside

- 3** Editorial with Simon Shane
- 4** Optimizing production from floor-housed pullets and hens
- 8** A look into price and performance
- 9** Finding the right future in knowledge and technology
- 12** New organic standards proposed
- 13** Products
- 14** News
- 14** Marketplace

p4



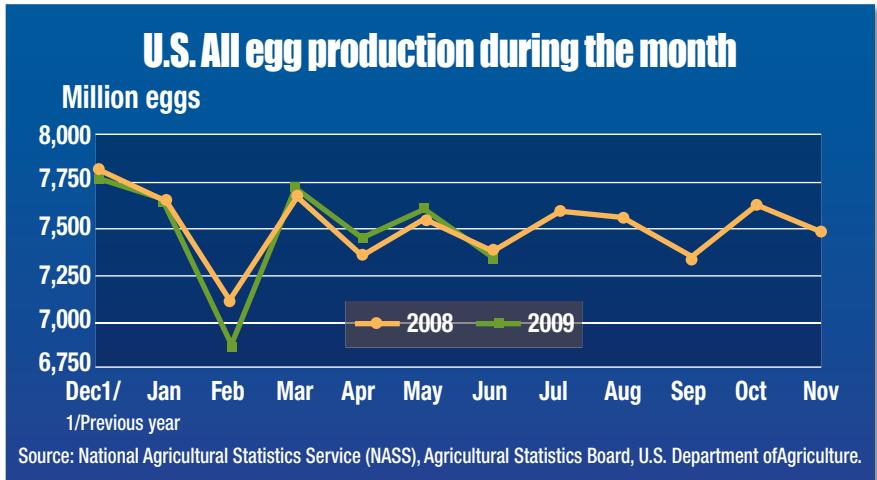
Optimizing production from floor-housed pullets and hens

The use of perches can increase the use of vertical space, help birds learn to jump and climb and assist in developing their leg and flight muscles.



New organic standards proposed

p12



USDA NASS statistics show June 2009 production of 7.343 billion eggs down slightly from June 2008 production of 7.367 billion eggs. Production included 6.29 billion table eggs and 1.06 billion hatching eggs, of which 988 million were broiler-type and 70 million were egg-type.



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Egg industry sees rising hopes and concerns

As we observe and react to gyrations in UB prices, we can take some solace in the recent upturn and a concomitant easing of feed costs. The projections of the size of our national flock made by Don Bell suggest restraint in expansion which is appropriate given the reduction in consumer spending. We hope to regain \$1 per dozen during the fourth quarter of 2009.



Simon Shane

This August edition of *Egg Industry* includes items of extreme concern to producers of eggs from non-confined flocks, including:

✓The proposed amendments to housing and management standards for organic production have the capacity to

disqualify existing commercial-scale producers and will lead to a profound contraction of this segment of the egg market if adopted.

✓The contribution by Dr. O'Sullivan of Hy-Line International provides a valuable insight into the behavior of floor-housed pullets and hens in relation to their productivity.

✓An interview with Dr. Pearse Lyons, president of Alltech, highlights changing attitudes towards use of non-antibiotic feed additives and new directions in research on the nutrition of poultry.

✓Current events which influence industry profitability are considered, incorporating commentary and interpretation of their significance and impact.

As always, please feel free to respond with suggestions for articles, requests for data and information or any comments relating to our industry.

Simon
sshane@nc.rr.com

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published monthly by WATT
303 N Main St Ste 500,
Rockford, Illinois 61101-1018 USA
Tel: (815) 966-5574,
Fax: (815) 968-0941,
<http://www.wattpoultry.com>

CONTENT DIRECTOR — POULTRY

Gary Thornton: gthornton@wattnet.net

PUBLISHER

Steve Akins: sakins@wattnet.net

EDITOR

Simon M Shane: sshane@nc.rr.com

SENIOR CONTENT EDITOR

Sue Roberts: sroberts@wattnet.net

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Eric Eyberger: eeyberger@wattnet.net

MANAGING ART DIRECTOR

Tess Stukenberg: tstukenberg@wattnet.net

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Bill Spranger: bspranger@wattnet.net

TO ADVERTISE: US/CANADA

Pam Ballard: pballard@wattnet.net

Sue Snyder: ssnyder@wattnet.net

Ginny Stadel: gstadel@wattnet.net

TO ADVERTISE: SOUTHEAST ASIA

Dingding Li: dingdingli@vip.163.com

TO ADVERTISE: INTERNATIONAL

Michael van den Dries: driesmvd@xs4all.nl

Bram Westers: bwesters@xs4all.nl

Frans Willem van Beeman: beemenfv@xs4all.nl

Tineke van Spanje: spanje@xs4all.nl

SUBSCRIPTIONS:

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Optimizing production from floor-housed pullets and hens



The use of perches can increase the use of vertical space, help birds learn to jump and climb and assist in developing their leg and flight muscles.

Neil O'Sullivan, PhD

Hy-Line selection programs, in common with most primary breeders, involve coordinated evaluation of strains on research farms in a molecular biology laboratory, an egg quality laboratory and field progeny tests. The objective of our genetics program is to achieve continuous improvement in all traits. Genetic progress must be measured annually applying a variety of techniques. These include field tests of sire-coded crossbred daughters held under commercial conditions in multiple bird cages within representative areas of the U.S. and other countries. Both field production data and egg quality assays are used in evaluation. Research farms evaluate pedigree pure line daughters under strictly controlled conditions on one location in single bird cages. Performance and quality are evaluated and are subjected to computer analysis to develop Breeding Value Estimates.

Consistent with commercial demands, we and other primary breeders are aware of the importance of behavior as it impacts livability and production. Hy-Line is constantly striving to produce commercial strains which are compatible with emerging demands for sustainability. This implies improved feed conversion efficiency and a low volume of solid and liquid waste from flocks. Pullets and hens must now be adaptable to floor production systems in addition to cages. This

has implications for the inherent drive for dominance, the use of nest systems and retention of feather cover.

Behavioral issues in floor flocks

Significant problems encountered in floor systems include:

✓Fear - External stimuli and inter-flock interaction results in secretion of stress hormones which detract from optimal production by initiation of behaviors which impact feed and water intake and the use of nests and perches.

✓Elevated mortality – This may be due to trauma such as vent peck or chronic stress which may depress the immune response and render flocks susceptible to infections which would otherwise elicit an antibody response.

✓Broody behavior – A transitory cessation in egg production, associated with the secretion of prolactin. Affected hens sit in nests or on floor nests and are recognized by fluffed plumage and characteristic vocalization. The problem is generally initiated by overcrowding especially with high ambient temperatures.

Reducing stress for flocks

The key to preventing many behavioral issues lies in appropriate housing and management and achieving socialization within flocks. It is an unfortunate consequence of generally lower mortality attributable to improved breeding, vaccination and housing,

that many flocks have insufficient contact with humans. Wider use of controlled environment systems also limits contact with caretakers. Young flocks are frequently not habituated to stress factors associated with climatic change, noise, and exposure to unfamiliar equipment, and placement of feed and water lines at the time of transfer from pullet rearing to laying units.

House design should incorporate full light control which allows bright illumination during the brooding period and when flocks are inspected at intervals during the day. Low

Use of Perches (Adult Birds)	
Bird Density ft ² /hen	Length of Perch Space in/hen
1.0	3.2
1.2	2.2
1.4	0.8

Perches should be placed on slats where possible to maintain good litter conditions.

levels of light should be selected during the mid to late growing period.

Partial litter houses allow pullets to peck which is a natural behavior. Rearing pullets on stretch wire or slats will result in displacement pecking which can take the form of feather pecking of the neck at the time of maturity.

Perches are essential to develop the mus-

culo-skeletal system of pullets since this encourages the use of their leg and flight muscles. Either A-frame or suspended perches can be installed with allowances as shown in the Use of Perches Table (Page 4).

Pullets which are to be transferred to aviaries with multi-tier perching, feeding and watering must be reared in a compatible system so they adapt quickly to the three dimensions of the aviary house at the time of transfer.

Training of pullet flocks by constantly walking briskly with a light level of 25 to 30 foot candles is essential to socialize birds to humans. Walking should be spaced throughout the working day. A constant low light level will lead to fear, hence the need to increase the level of illumination when walking and inspecting flocks. Light intensity (not duration) should be increased in increments so that at the time of transfer the light level in the pullet house corresponds to the laying unit.

Beak treatment can be carried out at the hatchery during the 7 to 10-day age span using infra-red equipment or by trained and supervised operators using a hot blade trimmer with an appropriate sized template. A second

touch-up trim can be carried out at 12 weeks if required or if this procedure is a routine component of the production system. Early trim may adversely affect skeletal develop-

ment which is generally complete by 12 weeks. Excessive trimming will delay maturity and detract from total eggs produced per hen housed. Generally hens which have been

Enrichable System



The diagram shows a multi-tiered poultry housing system with red plastic perches and yellow plastic coated cage floors. Below it is a photograph of the actual system installed in a large aviary house.

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effectively trimmed show less aggression and fear than flocks with intact beaks.

Management of laying flocks

Appropriate design of laying houses can contribute to optimal hen behavior and production.

✓Light intensity in the house should be the lowest at the point of entry to the nests.

✓Air flow should be even throughout the house. Nests must be draft-free.

✓Perches over slats are beneficial and promote use of the vertical space in the house. Perches allow low-peck order hens to find sanctuary.

✓Nipples should be spaced at 12-inch centers. This permits birds to drink without fear from adjacent hens.

✓Time of transfer is a critical period of adjustment for pullets and will markedly influence socialization and flock performance.

✓The house should be sufficiently bright so that hens can explore their environment. Excessive light levels will be cause nervous or “flighty” flocks.

✓Nest boxes should be opened when birds are delivered. Tape open approximately every third flap to encourage exploration.

✓Nest light can be operated one hour before house lights and then turned off for the remainder of the day. Generally nest lights are only required during the first six weeks after transfer.

✓It is essential to walk the flock at least four times daily. The program should commence on the day of transfer and should continue through 26 weeks of age.

✓Placement of feeders and water lines should not obstruct entry to the nest.

✓Flocks should be “walked” from the perimeter of the house towards the nests.

If behavioral problems occur, attempt to analyze the cause. Causes may include:

✓Improper socialization, or

✓Incorrect light level or uneven pattern of light.

The bottom line

Behavioral problems and losses can be avoided by:

✓Appropriate design of pullet and laying housing,

✓Adjusting levels of illumination,

✓Acclimating pullets to human contact and facilitating socialization by frequent walking,

✓Installing perches to encourage musculo-skeletal development.

Fearful and poorly socialized flocks show displacement behaviors which reduce production and increase mortality. Despite advances in genetics, molecular biology, nutrition and disease control, it is only by application of good stockmanship that flocks attain their genetic potential. **EI**

Dr. Neil O’Sullivan obtained his baccalaureate and master’s degrees from University College, Dublin, Ireland in 1986 and 1988 respectively. He studied at VPI earning his Ph.D. under Prof. Paul Siegel. He is currently director of research and development for Hy-Line International with direct involvement in the complex breeding program and complementary management and nutritional factors contributing to attaining genetic potential.

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A look into price and performance

Don Bell, poultry specialist emeritus at the University of California at Riverside, is a frequent contributor to *Egg Industry*. Recently, he has provided information in regards to pricing and performance in eggs and flocks for professionals in the domestic poultry sector.

Part I

Egg market shows extreme price fluctuation

In a mailing to the egg industry, Bell has circulated a chart showing the wide fluctuation in egg prices from April through late July 2009. As we are aware, his comment that “things can change very quickly, it seems” characterizes the ongoing price situation.

The combination of low prices and high production costs has led to a reduction in flock size, with the hen complement on July 1 approximately 3 million lower than during the corresponding month in 2008. There are now 10 million fewer hens than in January 2009. The rate of lay for June 2009 was 0.9% higher than in 2008 which is equivalent to the output of 2.8 million hens. The increase may be due

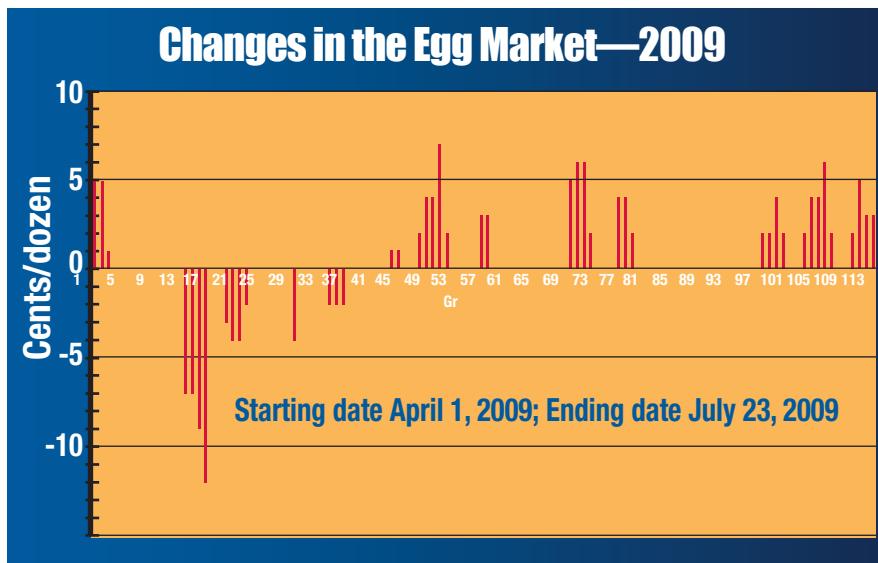


Chart reflects change in 2009 egg prices over the course of a 16 week period (April 1 – July 23).

to a reduction in age of the national flock and possibly milder than normal summer temperatures in the Midwest through June.

Part II

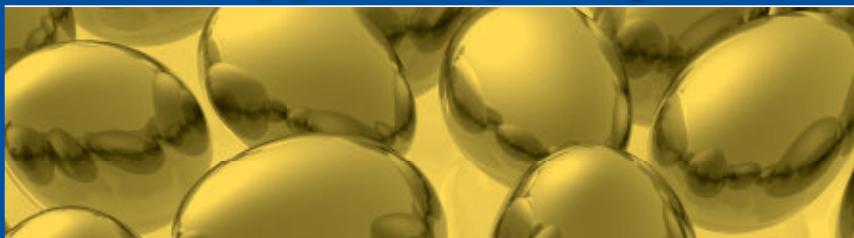
National flock performance study

Part 18 of the National Flock Performance

Study was published by Bell. In it, he depicts the performance obtained by the top quartile, average and lowest quartile of the 165 flocks in the study. The economic performance applied standard feed costs and pullet depreciation.

It is evident that the major differences between top and lowest quartile flocks, representing 41 observations each, can be attributed to low persistence and to a lesser extent, high mortality. There was a 30-egg per hen housed differential through the 60th week of age. Financial return was influenced by a combination of factors including the difference in feed intake, egg production, livability and flock productivity as measured by cumulative eggs hens housed, total egg mass, hen housed or the average daily egg mass per hen. **EI**

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The complete report, which includes evaluation of flocks though 100 weeks and a replacement analyses which considers pullet costs and the duration of the laying cycle, can be obtained from Don Bell directly at: don.bell@ucr.edu

Qa: Finding the right future in knowledge and technology

Dr. T. Pearse Lyons obtained his undergraduate degree from the National University of Ireland in Dublin followed by master's and doctoral degrees in biotechnology from the University of Birmingham. He is the recipient of a number of awards for promoting education, exports and for philanthropy.

Egg Industry: *Alltech is one of the top ten ranked animal health companies in the world. Please outline for our readers some of the significant achievements of your company during the past ten years.*



Dr. T. Pearse Lyons, president of Alltech, discusses the achievements of his company and how technology will help incorporate growth.

Dr. T. Pearse Lyons: Ten years ago our company did not have a focus on key products. We took a very entrepreneurial approach and we were developing new products at a fast pace. By deciding to focus on what we then called "the big six" we were able to concentrate our resources on six major items. We made investments in R&D and marketing using available financing. This focus undoubtedly allowed us to achieve growth in specific products which met our targets.

EI: *Alltech has developed an intensive international market and has been recognized for export promotion. How did you achieve this objective?*

TPL: During the past ten years we have optimized our efforts in all areas of the world under the Alltech brand name. During the early stages of the company we had to use distributors to develop a network in each country. Alltech has since established subsidiary companies in each country in which we operate and we brand our products with a single image.

EI: *Please share with us your vision regarding the future impact of non-antibiotic Consumer Acceptable Production Enhancers [CAPES] derived from advanced fermentation technology.*

TPL: Traceability and food safety are critical regulatory and consumer concerns and will drive our industry in the future. The key question concerns the role of antibiotics? I do not want to get into the scientific validity of whether the use of antibiotics is right or wrong. The fact of the matter is that this is not an issue that the feed industry should be addressing. It is the responsibility of the manufacturers of antibiotics. If the consumer decides that they don't want antibiotics used in the production of

their food, then they as consumers have the perfect right to freedom from antibiotics. The consumer has already spoken in the European Union which has responded by banning a number of antibiotics. Under the precautionary principal if there is any potential for a problem, specific ingredients or additives are disallowed. My vision is that we will see an industry which focuses on improving animal health and reducing the cost of production by using alternatives to antibiotics.

EI: *You travel extensively meeting with leaders among the U.S. and international animal production industries. What lessons can we apply to become more effi-*



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TPL: The key is speeding adoption of new technology. We frequently develop new techniques in the U.S. but these are not applied by our domestic industry which is extremely conservative. We have university programs which reflect this approach. By not pursuing valid research addressing alternatives to antibiotics we are falling behind international markets. Two concerns have emerged in the past decade. These are the speed at which research is carried out and the rate of adoption of beneficial alternatives to antibiotics.

EI: *Can you provide an example of this reluctance to try new approaches?*

TPL: Patented technology now exists based on application of the gene chip to reduce vitamin E levels as currently used in conventional diets for livestock. Why have we allowed ourselves to use excessive levels of vitamin E? Gene expression studies show that antioxidants and co-factors of the inherent cellular protective systems

can reduce the dietary requirement for vitamin E. Technology for sparing vitamin E has now been transferred overseas.

EI: *We have experienced unprecedented escalation in the cost of grains. Can biotechnology reverse this trend in the future?*

TPL: Perhaps in the U.S. we suffer from the fact that we have an abundance of corn and soy as the raw materials of choice. In the future is it not grain that will be our raw material but rather plant fiber in the form of cellulose. We have the technology to break down cellulose. Ten years ago Alltech built a plant in Serdan, Mexico followed more recently by a second plant in the U.S. using solid state fermentation (SSF) which enables plant fiber to be used as an ingredient. No amount of money can drive adoption of new technology. There has to be willingness and a desire on the part of our industry to adopt these innovations.

EI: *Sustainability was the theme of the recent 25th Annual Alltech International Animal Health and Nutrition Symposium. How do you envision that U.S. egg producers can contribute to the goal of enhanced sustainability?*

TPL: Any industry or sector of that industry must look to the future. To be sustainable we have to not only adapt the latest technology but we have to produce something that is acceptable to the consumer.

EI: *How does this apply to the egg industry?*

TPL: The American Egg Board and the UEP have done a great job of promoting the benefits of eggs. Now we have to look to other applications. We need to do more to expand the use of eggs, develop new applications for enriched eggs which include selenium, folic acid, vitamin D and other nutrients in shell and derived products. Promotion should be supported by appropriate information and educational programs.

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EI: Production efficiency and profitability can be enhanced by application of technology. What do you regard as recent noteworthy contributions to improve performance?

TPL: The gene chip is outstanding in this regard and represents a paradigm shift in our understanding of nutrition. We will redefine nutrition of the layer, broiler, and turkey by identifying the genetic control of metabolic pathways. The second opportunity area for Alltech is the use of cellulose as a raw material. We have committed considerable resources to this area and we have sponsored five doctoral-level programs in 2008 alone. We are also looking at reduction of greenhouse gases. Parallel developments in sustainability might include the use of solar panels and linking production of methane with appropriate waste handling systems that could produce energy.

EI: Your company has invested heavily in R&D and has sponsored extramural studies in a number of academic institutions. Are these endeavors producing a return commensurate with the effort and expenditure involved?

TPL: Teaching and training in academic institutions must be supported by industry. However, bureaucratic restraints and the view that these institutions must now be financially self-sufficient are changing the way industry interacts with universities. We have encountered a lack of urgency and increasing obstacles imposed by university administrators. This has stimulated a greater reliance on internal R&D and research conducted by contract facilities.

EI: As the president and principal shareholder in your company, you have the capability to apply earnings to civic, cultural and educational projects. Would you outline the scope and anticipated benefit from these "social dividends"?

TPL: It's less a question of social dividends and more a question of doing what is right. What was right a thousand years ago is still right in 2009. People and companies have a social responsibility to give back to the society in which they live. We have to extend a lending hand and provide encouragement to those who are less fortunate. For example, we are

currently running a program in Ireland to raise money to build orphanages in South Africa. Social involvement requires responses to the HIV crisis, the tsunami recovery efforts in SE Asia or even Hurricane Katrina in our own nation. Social involvement includes encouraging science education. We continue to support science programs at the elementary, middle and high school levels in addition to

universities. This social involvement on one hand helps society but on the other creates a sense of teamwork within the Alltech community. At our recent symposium we reviewed letters from young scientists, including undergraduates who attended programs sponsored by Alltech. They talked about it being a life-changing experience. This type of response is sufficient reward for doing the right thing. **EI**

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New organic standards proposed

The Accredited Certifiers Association has drafted a guidance document for organic poultry production. The intent is to codify space requirements which will conform to EU standards. The National Organic Standards Livestock Committee is scheduled to revisit these certification standards which are based on “natural behavior of animals.”

The proposals include the following requirements:

- ✓ Access to dust baths or litter,
- ✓ Areas of retreat in both houses and outdoor areas,
- ✓ Perches for layers,
- ✓ A minimum of 30% of the area of floor houses must comprise litter,
- ✓ Sufficient exit area along the walls of houses to allow outside access.

The guidance document specifies “an area equal to ten linear feet per thousand square foot of house space.” Since the terms “area” and “linear feet” are inconsistent it is assumed that the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the openings provided, should amount to 10 linear feet per 1,000 square feet of floor area.

Floor requirements

The most important restrictions in the proposed standards relate to floor area:

- ✓ Indoor floor space: 1 square foot/pullet and 1.8 square feet /laying hen,
- ✓ Outdoor runs: 2 square feet/pullet and 2.7 square feet/per laying hen.

Using a typical converted broiler breeder house or a purpose-constructed slat-and-litter floor house 400 feet by 50 feet in extent, the flock would comprise 11,111 hens at a

density of 1.8 square feet/hen. The outside area would extend 75 feet from the long wall of the house to provide 30,000 square feet for the flock. This would restrict the number of houses per farm and prevent existing and proposed in-line and multi-house floor and aviary units from complying with organic requirements.

The proposed standards also state that birds must not be confined to houses due to a threat of an outbreak of disease. Confinement is permitted if there is a documented occurrence of a disease in the region or migratory pathway or in the event of a state or federal advisory. Producers must also “identify how they plan to protect birds from disease and predators.”

Organic impact

The proposed standards, based on EU requirements will clearly impact commercial-scale production of organic eggs. The National Organics Standards Board was unable to state or justify a specific area requirement when the regulations were originally established, allowing domination of organic egg production by commercial farms responding to free-market supply-and-demand considerations. Should organic egg production be seriously curtailed over the five-year period of implementation of the suggested standards, major food distributors and retailers will be unable to obtain adequate and regular supplies of product. The cost of production would escalate further curtailing demand. Organic egg production will contract to a group of small-scale producers supplying local outlets.

Current family-owned and corporate producers of organic eggs will revert to cage-free status based on their existing investment in housing and facilities which may range from \$15-20 per hen for converted housing and as much as \$35 per hen for advanced aviary installations. The proposal to extend space requirements and especially outside access without any scientific justification will be ul-

timately destructive to the U.S. organic egg production sector and the certifying agencies without producing any tangible benefits in terms of welfare, food safety or consumer satisfaction.

It is inevitable that if the suggested standards are adopted, existing commercial producers of organic eggs may develop a new category of product based on organic feed, drug-free systems, high standards of hygiene and safety which are not currently addressed in the NOP requirements. Although these eggs will not be eligible for the “USDA Organic” logo, the product will be available in sufficient quantity and at a price which satisfies demand. An educational campaign for consumers and the support of the supermarket and institutional sectors for a wholesome egg product conforming to existing organic production standards will be required. USDA-Certified organic product

For more information on the Accredited Certifiers Association, their practices and potential membership, visit them on the Web at: www.accreditedcertifiers.org

will revert to the mom-and-pop producers with limited resources, and possibly questionable food safety. To justify the proposed regulations on the basis of “harmonization with the EU or Canada” is fallacious since there is no trade in organic eggs within NAFTA or to the EU. Given the proposed regulations future exports would appear even more remote.

There is an obvious need for common sense in the selection of standards and evaluation of organic requirements and the design of future production systems. Standards should take into account science-based practices and economic realities. Certifying agencies and the NOP should assess the impact of “moving the goalposts” after an industry has been created and investment committed to a market segment. **E**

PRODUCTNEWS

Egg cargo system



Vencomatic is now offering the Twin Pack Egg Cargo System which comprises trays, pallets and dividers. The stable and reusable components offer advantages over conventional wooden pallets and ply dividers. All components can be decontaminated and carry a seven-year warranty.

Vencomatic, www.vencomatic.ca

Casella air sampling pumps

Casella USA, a subsidiary of UK based Casella CEL, has introduced the TUFF tm range of air sampling pumps which are used in occupational health applications.

Casella USA, www.casellausa.co



Chr. Hansen direct fed microbial

Chr. Hansen Inc. has introduced GalliPro Tect direct fed microbial to the U.S. industry. According to the company, this product is positioned as an aid to control necrotic enteritis and, presumably, other clostridial enterotoxemias. The product, which comprises a suspension of *Bacillus licheniformis*, is added to feed as a preventive. Company studies have demonstrated acceptable control of necrotic enteritis, equivalent to virginamycin.

Chr. Hansen Inc., www.chr-hansen.com

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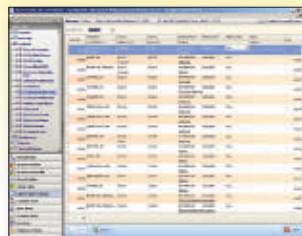
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INDUSTRY NEWS

Survey cites consumer concerns

IBM Corp. has released a survey among food consumers relating to confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply. Concern is evident based on highly publicized recent recalls of green vegetables and peanut products.

It is considered significant that 83% of respondents were able to name a product recalled during the past year. This is attributed to wide media coverage of food related problems. Approximately half of the respondents indicated that they would be less likely to purchase a product following a recall. Only half of the respondents trust food manufacturers to withdraw and recall adulterated or contaminated food products but 70% indicated that they trust supermarkets and grocery stores to respond promptly to recalls. IBM also determined that traceability is essential in establishing consumer confidence and this aspect of production will in the future receive greater attention from regulatory agencies and certifying bodies.

Legislation to preempt HSUS voter welfare initiatives

A package of bills has been introduced into the Michigan Legislature designed to establish a standard for farm animal care. The plan placed before the House Agriculture Committee will define the authority of the Department of Agriculture

and the Agriculture Commission as the sole authority to regulate livestock health and welfare. This action follows similar legislation in Oklahoma. Standards for animal care to be implemented by 2020 will be based on scientific knowledge.

An Animal Care Advisory Council will make recommendations for changes to standards and a third party auditing system will be created to oversee the program. This legislation was developed and supported by a broad range of animal industry groups and associations including the Michigan Veterinary Medical Association, Dairy Farmers of America and both the Michigan Corn and Soybean Grower's Associations.

In a similar measure, the Ohio House and Senate Agriculture Committees have passed a joint resolution empowering the Livestock Care Standards Board to regulate housing and welfare of livestock. The Board would include experts in poultry and food animal care including farmers, veterinarians, practitioners of food safety, the Dean of Agriculture at an Ohio university and representatives of local humane societies and consumer groups. The HSUS which has threatened to mount a 2008-style Proposition 2 initiative opposed this action which will be placed before the electorate in November 2009. It is considered significant that in legislative hearings the HSUS was questioned as to its motives and intended activities. **EI**

MARKETPLACE

Ad sizes start at one column by one inch and can be any size up to six column inches. Logos and photographs are acceptable. Add color for an additional \$30 per color per insertion. The rate for EGG INDUSTRY is \$120 per inch per insertion (1-time rate), \$110 per inch per insertion (6-time rate), and \$100 per inch per insertion (12-time rate). The production charge is included except for ads with excessive make-up demands.

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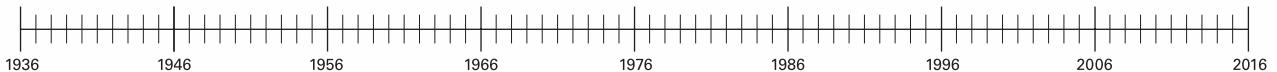
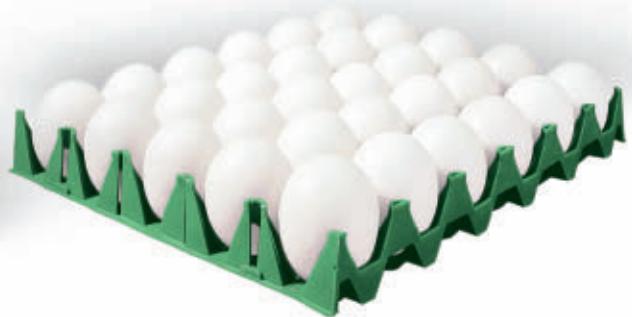


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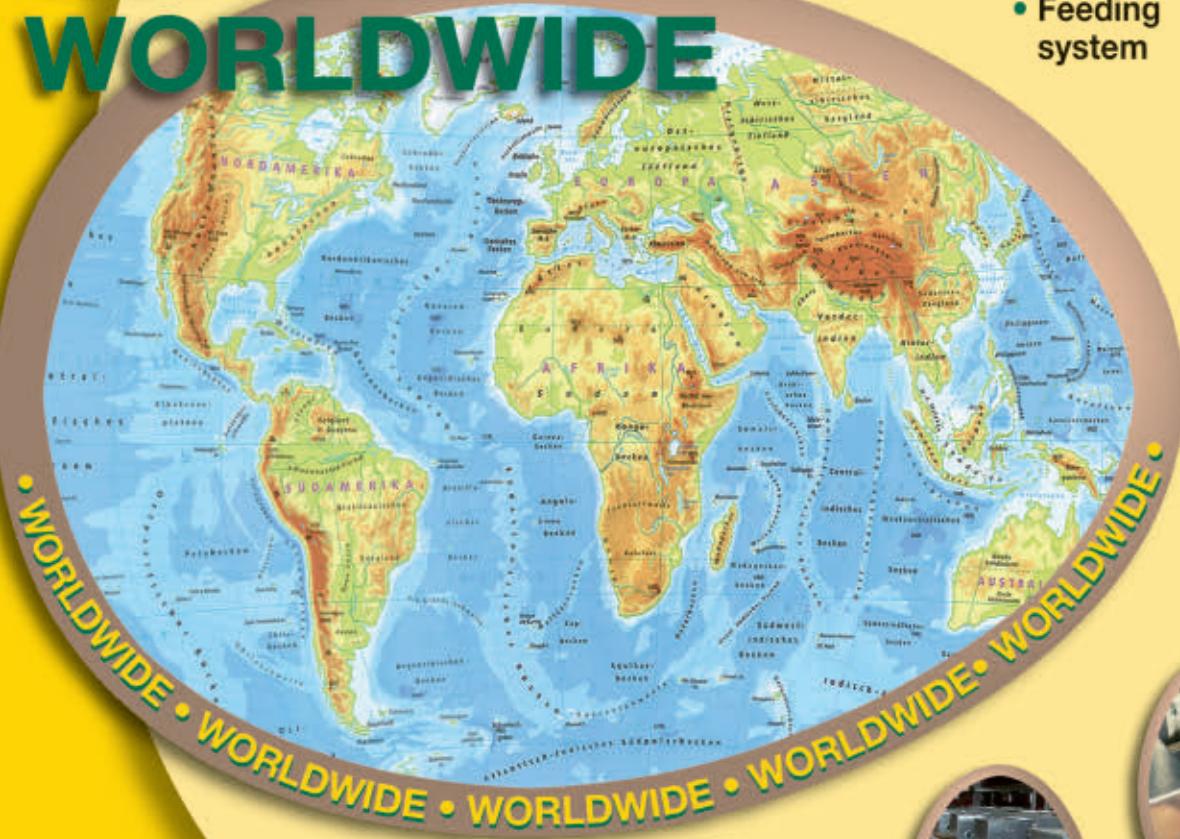
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