

Title: Certification and Labelling in the Australian Egg Industry

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Authors: F.P. Gale

Private governance via standard setting, auditing, certification and labelling is developing a space in Australia and elsewhere. Increasingly, however, consumers are becoming sceptical of labels and want to know they can trust the claims being made.

This project investigates private governance in the Australian egg industry. It focuses on the process in which labels signal to consumers how the eggs were produced and on the standard setting, auditing and certification arrangements that underpin these labelling claims.

Six major egg labelling schemes were assessed: Australian Certified Organic (ACO), Egg Corp Assured (ECA), Free Range Egg & Poultry Australia (FREPA), Free Range Farmers Association (FRFA), Humane Choice True Free Range (HC) and RSPCA's Accredited Farming Scheme (RSPCA). For comparative purposes, the study also assessed the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) scheme, viewed by many as an example of 'best practice' in the field of private governance.

Using a mapping technique developed and pioneered by the researcher, the study plotted the seven schemes across three dimensions: political, institutional and regulatory. The three-dimensional mapping revealed significant differences between egg labelling schemes in terms of who runs them (political dimension), how they operate (institutional dimension), and the nature of the standard underpinning the labelling claim (regulatory dimension). The mapping also highlighted a significant difference between all egg labelling schemes and the FSC's scheme.

The study found that all egg labelling groups have invested a great deal of time, energy and money in elaborating their schemes and are unlikely to undertake initiatives to merge to form a new 'stewardship' standard. The industry is internally divided across egg production systems and no simple resolution of the caged, barn and free range conflict is evident.

There may however, be an opportunity to develop an integrated 'sustainable' egg production certification and labelling scheme building on free range production methods. For example, an Egg Certification Council could potentially emerge from a combination of existing free range systems which would most likely be the initiative of a new, independent group.