

# How vaccination technology is changing the egg industry



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Australians consume more than 6.3 billion eggs a year, which is over 17.3 million eggs each day. To ensure the safe and reliable production of these millions of eggs, Australian egg farmers are embracing technology to help improve the vaccination process of hens for better hen welfare.

Vaccination is an expensive but vital part of egg production. With hens needing to be vaccinated three times during their growing stage, it means egg farmers are vaccinating their flocks most of the year.

In the industry, manually vaccinating hens is standard, but new, innovative technology is now allowing egg farmers to automatically vaccinate their hens, which is improving occupational health and safety outcomes - reducing physical labour and the risk of repetitive strain injury (RSI) for farm staff - whilst improving hen welfare.

Rowan McMonnies, Managing Director of Australian Eggs, said: "Manual vaccinations are a challenging task for farm staff, and the recent pandemic has made it hard to source manual labour to support this part of the production process."

"One of the difficulties with the manual process is reliability as the injection can sometimes be ineffective, leaving the birds exposed."

"With hens required to be vaccinated throughout their growing stages, alternative methods for vaccinating like autovaccination are being adopted by the Australian egg industry and we are seeing great results."

Valley Park Farm, a free-range egg farm in Victoria, is one of the first egg farms that has adopted autovaccination, implementing electric and pneumatic machines that can provide multiple injections with increased accuracy and repeatability.

John Fyfe, General Manager at Valley Park, said: "Autovaccination is a slightly more expensive option, but the benefits are far greater than the cost."

“The technology has made the vaccinating process more reliable, with hens receiving a guaranteed controlled dose of a vaccine in the right place, and it has improved the efficiency and safety of injectable vaccination for our staff through automation.

“Autovaccination has also extended the duration and level of immunity of our hens, helping to maintain and increase hen welfare, with our farms experiencing less disease challenges since embracing the technology.

“The machines also count the number of injections that have been completed, improving the monitoring of vaccination quantities, so, for example, you can confirm you are putting 1,000 doses into 1,000 birds.

“Overall, our hens are safer, and we can spend more time raising them so there are better outcomes for us long-term as a business in producing healthy eggs.”

Valley Park vaccinate 180 to 200 days a year so having the autovaccine machines has become a game changer.

“With the emergence of free-range systems, extra vaccines are needed, and autovaccination will become increasingly important for disease prevention. Seeing new technology, like autovaccination, bettering egg farms and the overall industry is very exciting and something the industry should be very proud of,” added Mr McMonnies.

“The egg industry is one of the most progressive agriculture industries in Australia. By implementing new technology across the industry, we strive to demonstrate responsiveness to the concerns of the Australian community, which contributes to a higher trust in the industry. In fact, our recent community research shows that 8 in 10 (80%) Australians believe that technology has improved the welfare and environmental outcomes of egg farms, and this in turn has contributed to close to 2 in 3 (65%) Australians expressing trust in the egg industry to act responsibly.”

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