

Women of the egg industry: International Women's Day 2021

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International Women's Day (March 8) is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women.

To help celebrate IWD, Australian Eggs wanted to help raise the profile of women working in the industry, recognise their achievements as individuals and showcase their contributions to our industry. We asked a few familiar faces from around the country to share their experiences of working in our industry.

Danyl Cucinotta - Victorian Farmers Federation and LT's Egg Farm



In early December 2020, the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) elected the first female leadership duo to their organisation since its conception over 40 years ago. VFF members elected Emma Germano as president and Danyel Cucinotta, generational Victorian caged-egg farmer in Werribee as the vice-president.

Already a committee member of the VFF Intensives Group and Egg Farmers Australia media representative, Danyel also holds an Agriculture Diploma and Bachelor of Business. She explains that she started testing the waters of media and policy in 2016 and her appointment as vice president of VFF is her first big role representing all types of farming beyond eggs.

A proud third-generation egg farmer, Danyel has lived and breathed eggs her entire life. Working with her family and being able to watch her daughter grow up on the farm with them are some of the things she says she enjoys most about her job.

Growing up and working on the family farm her whole life, Danyel was adamant that she was not going to make egg farming her career. After finishing school, she left for university and studied business then came back to the farm because she realised she wanted to stay working with the family and didn't see herself doing anything else. Continuing to explore the different opportunities of the business and egg industry, her father introduced her to other avenues such as media and policy and she hasn't looked back.

Besides her recent VFF appointment, Danyel explains that she is most proud of her accomplishments relating to their farm's community engagement program where she travels to community groups to educate and discuss the myths of caged egg farming.

Julie Proctor - Sunny Queen Australia



Sunny Queen Australia CEO Julie Proctor has more than 25 years of industry leading experience, garnered through a global career.

In 1997, Jules migrated from the UK to Australia, moving to Melbourne to join National Foods in the role of Senior Brand Manager, responsible for the Pura milk portfolio.

Julie's marketing experience led her to Sunny Queen Australia in 2004, beginning her journey as the National Marketing and Innovation Manager. Her 16-year tenure has seen her work across multiple facets of the business, from Innovation and R&D, to Quality, Compliance, and Manufacturing. Julie was Chief Operating Officer prior to her appointment to the role of Chief Executive Officer in February 2020.

Jules' advice for anyone wanting to start work in the egg industry is "Do it - jump in! It is a fascinating, rapidly evolving industry with such a brilliant food source at its core, bursting with so much opportunity for growth. And everyone really does have the chance to contribute, to help shape the industry for the generations to come".

Jules explains that one of the biggest challenges she feels all producers in the egg industry constantly face is being able to meet the constantly evolving expectations of our customers in a way that is commercially viable and sustainable.

For 2021 Jules hopes that we can put many of the huge challenges and uncertainties that Mother Nature has thrown our way in the last year behind us, whilst holding on to the positive lessons the year has taught us - better communication, resilience, greater agility - so we can all move forward and prosper.

Rachel Wilson - Fremantle Egg Company



Being born into an egg producing family, Rachel Wilson, Manager of Fremantle Egg Company become more involved in the business operations when she identified areas within the business she could put her stamp on to expand and grow.

Throughout her time as an egg producer, Rachel has been always been recognised by her peers as a young leader and a good example for the industry. She is proud of her contributions as an industry advocate, being invited to speak to university students who are completing their Vet and Animal Science degrees about the challenges the industry currently faces.

Rachel explains that one of the biggest challenges of working in the egg industry has been having to adapt their business model to meet the challenges of climate change and growing consumer awareness of how chickens are farmed.

When asked for what advice she had for anyone wanting to start work in the egg industry, Rachel replied "Aim to educate yourself! Be prepared to attend industry workshops or seminars to not only learn about the industry but network with other farmers and be able to derive inherent knowledge".

Melinda Hashimoto - Egg Farmers of Australia



For over five years, Melinda Hashimoto was working in politics as a Ministerial Adviser assisting the state and federal ministers that were responsible for overseeing the poultry sector in Australia. After deciding to leave politics, she was approached by Egg Farmers of Australia to consider a role as Chief Executive Officer. Although she was also in discussions with another industry, Melinda felt she would have a better opportunity to use her skills in the egg industry and followed a gut feeling that it was where she should be. She became CEO of Egg Farmers of Australia in 2019, advocating on key policy issues affecting the egg industry and promoting egg production by providing transparent information to the public.

On the contributions of women in the egg industry, Melinda said “it is great to be working in an industry where there are so many women who will take over the egg production business as the next generation of their family, have prominent roles in an business, are involved in roles as vets or are strong leaders of knowledge in the egg industry”.

When reflecting on the last twelve months, Melinda said “egg farmers just got on with producing eggs for the nation. The combination of COVID-19 and Avian Influenza has certainly added an extra level of complexity but there is a lot to be said for staying calm and carrying on!”.

Jess Spencer - Days Eggs



While undertaking a Bachelor of Animal Science degree and enjoying the experience she was having working with poultry during her studies, Jess Spencer decided to focus her interests to pursue a career in the egg industry. After joining Days Eggs 6 years ago, Jess's passion was ignited further, and she knew she was on the right path.

Jess says she loves her job because she works with a great bunch of people who have a wide variety of skills and knowledge. She also explains how she has grown to absolutely love chickens and enjoys being able to see them and work with them every day.

Currently the Poultry Welfare Manager at Days Eggs, Jess has been working hard every day to achieve the goals she sets for herself and is proud to be a part of an industry that has worked rigorously to produce eggs in order to still feed the people of Australia in a time where the nation has been scared and food and supplies have been in high demand.

Jess says that one of the things she enjoys most about her job is that the industry is always changing and new information is emerging so she is able to continuously learn and implement changes that contribute to the progression of the industry.

Working and living in rural Australia, Jess has noticed that every woman she has met along the way has one similar quality which is that they are tough. While they show empathy and care, they are also all determined people who speak their mind, dig in to help get the job done and have their own opinions which they share. They don't hold back and which she thinks is a great quality.

Debbie Bampfield - Farm Pride



A hairdresser by trade, Deb Bampffield got to the point in her life where she decided she wanted a career change. With a husband already working in the poultry industry, she followed in his steps and found a casual position on an egg farm to get her by until she decided what she wanted to do next.

Within three weeks, Deb fell in love with working with chickens and all the challenges that come with it and the casual position quickly turned into a full-time role. Five years later, Deb is now Cage Farm Manager at Farm Pride.

Deb says the things she enjoys most about her job are the day-to-day challenges of running a farm, seeing a new flock of birds come into production and watching them grow, and when projects to improve the shed turn out better than expected.

When asked if there was any advice for any new-comers to the industry, Deb said “you need to have a passion for animals, believe in yourself - you can do anything you set your mind to, be hard working, dedicated, organised and have an eye for detail. Mostly, having a can-do attitude is what will help you achieve your goals”.

During her time as Cage Farm Manager, Deb is most proud of completely overhauling the farm she is responsible for and has been able to considerably improve the productivity of the birds and the workforce by engaging her team and encouraging an enjoyable working environment.

Elise Moncrieff - Lake Macquarie Free Range Eggs



Wanting to break away from her corporate government job five years ago, Elise Moncreiff, Business Manager of Lake Macquarie Free Range Eggs, took the opportunity to partner with her father-in-law to help downsize from his larger free range egg business.

Since starting out in the new business, Elise has made a lot of changes in their farm practices and beams with pride to have had veterinarians comment on how impressed they were with their operations and congratulating them for initiatives that they hadn't seen before.

Consumer perceptions and opinions on what they believe to be ideal techniques for farming is something that Elise finds most challenging for the industry. Through her experience in farming, she became more aware about strong consumer sentiment towards where food comes from and how its produced and she believes it is really important for all farmers to educate loudly about farming techniques and to be proud of it.

Elise describes the top things she most enjoys about her job is the variety and that no two days are the same, being able to work with animals and a great group of people and hearing feedback about their products.

The advice she would give to anyone wanting to start work in the egg industry is "Do it! Yes, egg farming is 365 days a year, but there is so much variety and opportunity to learn. It's not skipping through paddocks with a basket collecting eggs (unless you want it to be), there is so much more that goes into producing an egg than someone who hasn't done it before could ever imagine!".

Jan Harwood - Margaret River Free Range Eggs

30 years ago, Jan Harwood was thrust into the egg industry after her husband Kim commenced his pursuit into egg farming and quickly realised it was going to require a team effort. The husband-and-wife owner-operators started with just 4,000 hens then grew to a current flock of 25,000 free range hens and employing 25 staff. After 30 years of learning from experience, overcoming setbacks and adapting to constant challenges, it is only now that they are starting to feel like they've finished their 'apprenticeship' in egg farming.

Focused on raising a young family, Jan never intended to be a farmer or businesswoman but now she wears all of the hats within the business. Having to be hands-on and learn every aspect of the business, she discovered a natural ability in marketing and strong dislike towards sales.

Jan explains that the couple's willingness to learn and improve is why they have always been so involved and

open to research and development opportunities. She adds “it is a bit scary when the health authorities want to come and test your farm for pathogens, but our philosophy has always been to find out and if there’s a problem so we can fix it”.

Throughout the hard times, Jan says one of the main things that kept them going was the hens. She beams “they are fascinating creatures with really unique personalities to suit. They produce a food product that is almost perfect and valued by the community”.

Jan says she has learnt so much from being an egg producer and her experience in the industry has shaped the person she is today, having reinforced her resilience and uncovered an interest in finding solutions to challenges no matter how big or small.

A pearl of wisdom shared by Jan was her observation of seeing the effect of stress on hens and realising that in reducing our own stress we can take better care of our health, productivity and life.

Laura Fell - Blewitt Springs Farm Eggs

Working in a relatively new egg producing business, Laura Fell, Managing Director of Blewitt Springs Farm Eggs, says seeing the staff grow into their roles and develop their capabilities is one of the highlights of her job and it fills her with pride.

Starting in the poultry industry nearly 30 years ago as a contract chicken meat producer, she then started farming turkey meat under contract until that commercial arrangement was suddenly ended by the other party in 2014. Laura credits the kindness, knowledge and support of other egg producers who helped the business transition into egg production in 2015.

Laura describes the egg industry as vibrant and exciting, filled with challenges and to be deeply rewarding for her on a personal level. One of the things she most enjoys about her job is networking with other egg farmers and industry stakeholders. Laura believes through episodes of panic buying the egg industry has revealed to the general public its true worth. She says “previously taken for granted, eggs have proven how important they are as an accessible source of highly adaptable, healthy and cheap protein. It is becoming increasingly evident that egg production and agriculture is a reliable industry that it is of enormous value to the Australian economy and people”.

When asked what are some qualities that demonstrate the resilience of women in rural Australia, Laura explains that the enormous variety of rural women she has met over the years all seem to show the same general traits. She says “they are routinely industrious, quietly courageous, and actively supportive of their families, business enterprises and local communities. Increasingly but not exclusively the trend seems to be that they are educated, well-travelled and big picture thinkers, happy to step up to leadership roles. They work alongside their men or in place of them where necessary and support their families through all the ups and downs of rural living, no matter how tough things get”.

Alma Campbell-McKechnie - AUS-MEAT Limited

Alma Campbell-McKechnie, Egg Standards Australia (ESA) Program Co-ordinator at AUS-MEAT Limited, joined the egg industry in 2017 when her General Manager asked her to co-ordinate the ESA Program on behalf of AUS-MEAT. She felt it was a real privilege and was thrilled to start training for the program in order to assist Australian Eggs.

Alma explains that one of the things she most enjoys about her job is having an impact on helping sites achieve and maintain their certification and being able to help sites understand the reason for ESA. She explains that in her job she is never bored because each day is different and the tasks vary from answering auditor queries, working on auditing checklists, reviewing the standards

and protocols, communicating with different stakeholders to finding solutions to problems.

Alma's advice for anyone wanting to start work in the egg industry is to do their research, learn about the different production systems to understand each system has benefits and disadvantages, speak with different producers and if the opportunity arises for you to spend some time on the farm learning from experience – grab it!