

Women of the egg industry

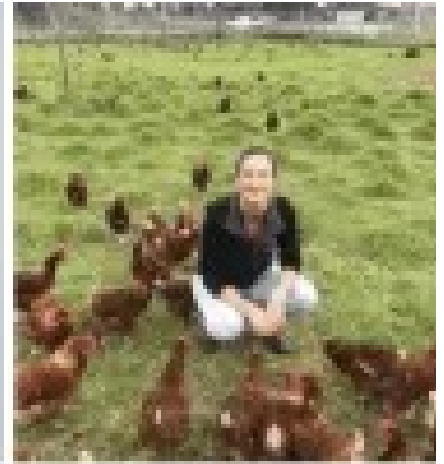


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To help recognise the achievements and contributions of women in the egg industry, Australian Eggs asked a few familiar faces from around the country to share their experiences of working in our industry.

Danyel 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 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.



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”.

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 pursuit a career in the egg industry. After joining Days Eggs, 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 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, and Deb was appointed 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.

Jan Harwood - Margaret River Free Range Eggs

Over 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. After 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.

Alma Campbell-McKechnie - Mérieux NutriSciences

Alma Campbell-McKechnie, Egg Standards Australia (ESA) Program Manager at Mérieux NutriSciences, joined the egg industry in 2017 when her General Manager asked her to co-ordinate the ESA Program on behalf of Mérieux NutriSciences. 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!

Jade Hoare - Pace Farm



Jade Hoare, Compliance Manager at Pace Farm, has been working in Quality Assurance for the past 13 years. Initially starting out in high care food manufacturing, Jade made the switch to the agricultural sector, where she has found her long-term career pathway.

After completing a Food and Nutrition degree, Jade realised that food safety is an important industry sector. With her love for food and its preparation, Quality Assurance seemed like a perfect fit.

Favourite aspects of her job include:

- Being involved in implementing changes and system improvements at Pace Farm and for the industry.
- Visiting different sites and interacting with a range of people, from farmers to production staff, external suppliers, and government agencies, to affect change within our industry.
- Knowing everyday will bring something different.

Within the next five years, Jade sees herself progressing within the farming agricultural sector, continuing to improve and implement compliance with industry standards in a practical way which suits both the farmers and regulatory compliance.

Teisha Brebner - Verstedden's Egg Farm

Teisha Brebner, a farm supervisor at Verstedden's Egg Farm, Victoria, began working in the egg industry in June 2016 after finishing school, and ever since, has had a keen interest in egg production processes – particularly rearing chickens for layer sheds and egg grading.

Teisha plans to remain in the industry for the foreseeable future and aspires to manage a layer rearing farm. She advises anyone wanting to start out in the egg industry to persevere through the sometimes-tough beginning and keep an open mind. "You would be surprised how rewarding it is to look after chickens. There are so many different aspects of the industry – it is so interesting."

Tamsyn Murray - Josh's Rainbow Eggs



Tamsyn Murray, CEO of Josh's Rainbow Eggs started out in the egg industry in 2010, alongside her son and company founder, Josh Murray. Initially beginning with just 40 hens, twelve years later the business has expanded to 12 sheds with hen numbers in their thousands.

A key highlight of working in the egg industry for Tamsyn is the fact that work is meaningful and tangible - she loves having an impact on people's lives and giving eggs to those who need them most.

She is also extremely passionate about educating customers, especially young people, about egg farming and hopes that in the future, the farm can develop an on-farm education centre with regular school tours and visits from Ag students.

Tamsyn encourages anyone wanting to start out in the egg industry to pursue it. "Eggs are one of the best industries to be in. It is an incredibly rewarding place to work as not only do we work with hens (best creatures) but also get to spend time in the great outdoors!"