

Hatching Ideas on Animal Welfare Stakeholder Engagement Report

Purpose

As part of Egg Farmers of Alberta's (EFA) ongoing sustainability strategy, EFA hosted *Hatching Ideas on Animal Welfare* (HIAW) on September 20, 2017. HIAW was a follow-up to the highly successful *Environmental Stewardship Workshop*, EFA's inaugural stakeholder engagement session that was hosted in 2015.

1. Share EFA's past, present and future efforts and initiatives related to animal welfare
2. Gain insights and a better understanding of expectations from a diverse set of 36 stakeholders from across the Canadian egg community (see Appendix 1)
3. Enhance relationships across the egg value chain
4. Identify a strategic path forward

Process

Participants spent the morning taking a tour of the recently constructed layer barn at Fairview Colony, which features a furnished/enriched hen housing system. The tour offered a unique opportunity to tour an empty barn first, allowing attendees a chance to thoroughly explore the housing units and ask a lot of questions, before touring a full barn to see the system in action. Following a delicious lunch provided by our gracious hosts, participants spent the afternoon discussing a variety of animal welfare issues during a facilitated engagement session.

Desired State

EFA and the Canadian egg industry work collaboratively to engage consumers with common and consistent messaging, focusing on the 'why' and connecting through our shared values, to build trust in Canadian eggs, egg farmers, and egg farming practices.

Key Takeaways from Stakeholders

1. Strengths:

- Healthy – eggs are enjoying a fantastic growth in sales, and are considered to be an affordable and nutritious source of high-quality protein
- Choice – consumers currently have both a wide variety of eggs to choose from at the grocery store, and a diverse choice of how/where to enjoy their eggs (ie: at home or at restaurants, including many that now offer all-day breakfast)
- Science-based – the recently released revised Code of Practice is the result of a collaborative, science-based approach to animal welfare
- Consumer-focused – thanks to the uniquely Canadian system of supply management, egg farmers are able to work together and with supply chain partners, to provide whatever mix of fresh, locally produced eggs consumers are demanding through their purchasing decisions
- Trust – consumers are curious to learn more about where their food comes from and how it was produced, and trust local farmers as a source of information
- Passion – stakeholders all along the egg value chain are eager to tell the ‘egg story’
- Collaboration – stakeholders throughout the egg community have a desire to do more together, and engagement sessions like HIAW are a positive first step in the journey

2. Weaknesses:

- Public disconnect – consumers want to know more about where their food comes from, but don’t know who to go to for information, and often aren’t engaging with the stakeholder group they hold most responsible for a particular issue (ie: care of animals)
- Industry disconnect – despite a desire for more egg industry collaboration and action, many stakeholders are making unilateral decisions, implementing individual campaigns or policies, and committing to self-serving public announcements
- Mixed messages – many stakeholders are trying to tell the complete ‘egg story’, even though they only play a part in that story, resulting in consumers receiving inconsistent, incomplete, or even inaccurate information
- Market competition – whereas animal welfare used to be a precompetitive issue, some stakeholders are starting to use various animal welfare claims as the basis for distinguishing their brands and building a competitive advantage
- What about the consumer? – egg farming organizations, retail organizations and animal activist groups are all making claims (and implementing strategic decisions) in the best interest of the consumer, while current egg purchasing statistics would seem to paint an entirely different picture; what do consumers actually want?
- What about the hens? – egg farming organizations, retail organizations and animal activist groups are all making claims (and implementing strategic decisions) in the best interest of the egg laying hens, while current scientific evidence could seem to paint an entirely different picture; what is actually best for the chickens?

3. Opportunities:

- Hero story – egg farmers are well regarded by the public, are held most responsible for actually caring for egg laying hens, and provide information that is trusted; only if and when they engage the public, which is not often enough
- Collaboration – rather than each stakeholder telling the ‘egg story’ themselves, they need to recognize that they are just one character or chapter in a much broader story, that can only be told effectively if done so together with common, consistent messaging
- Cage-free VS ??? – the RCC announcement about hen housing transition timelines should be considered a beginning, not an end; the non-binding announcement bought the Canadian egg industry time, and there is no reason to believe that: a) there isn’t another solution other than going cage-free; b) the clock can’t be reset
- Sustainability – stakeholders should be working together to build a sustainable Canadian egg industry, which is broader than just animal welfare or any one brand; public announcements and strategic decision-making should be the result of multi-stakeholder engagement
- Engagement – many consumers (especially millennials - the next generation of grocery shoppers) are hungry to learn more about their food, but don’t want to be educated; industry stakeholders must work together to connect with consumers, relate to them via shared values, and focus on why it matters to those consumers (bombarding consumers with facts, truths and science is ineffective)
- Transparency – effective communication needs to be proactive, positive, transparent, two-way, and not be perceived as defensive in nature

4. Threats:

- Competition – any move to compete over “the most animal welfare friendly egg” by graders, retailers or food service can send conflicting signals to consumers, and directly/indirectly tarnish the perception of a particular type of egg or egg farming practice
- Squeaky-wheel – in today’s digital arena it comes down to what is said most often, rather than what is said or who is saying it; facts and scientific evidence tend to take a backseat to sensationalism
- Fear of change – there is a natural tendency to fear change or be slow to embrace change, even when there is agreement that change is required to benefit all stakeholders
- What’s next? – though hen housing currently dominates the animal welfare conversation in the egg industry, there are a number of emerging issues on the horizon that stakeholders need to start discussing now (ie: male chicks, feather cover, mortality, euthanasia, mass depopulation, etc...)
- Supply management – the system was designed for the egg industry to respond to changing consumer demands, and any decision by the industry to manipulate consumer demand could serve to undermine the system itself
- Leadership – farmers and retailers (and other value chain partners in between) have both said they are waiting for input/direction from the other; without collaborative egg industry leadership, our collective desired state cannot ever possibly be achieved

5. Constraints & Barriers:

- Tradeoffs – animal welfare is just one piece of the puzzle in terms of building a sustainable Canadian egg industry, along with food safety, environmental impacts, worker safety, production efficiencies, economics, etc...
- Silent majority – egg industry stakeholders are threatened and motivated by a very vocal minority, while approximately 80% of Canadian shoppers continue to feel confident feeding their families the most affordable eggs available to them
- National industry – retailers, food service, graders, processors and the broad range of animal welfare related issues are bigger than just Alberta; they are national in scope
- Long-term planning – strategic decisions that impact on-farm operations cannot be implemented quickly (or undone/revised quickly), so all stakeholders must be sure that each decision is the right decision, not just the easy decision

Potential Solutions to Consider

1. National multi-stakeholder engagement

- Egg industry stakeholders from across Canada work together to develop shared strategies for managing specific topics (ie: hen housing), as precompetitive issues
- Working together effectively on animal welfare (specific components of animal welfare) is a necessary first step on the journey to collaboratively build a sustainable Canadian egg industry

2. Collaborative storytelling

- Egg industry stakeholders work together to better educate one another about specific animal welfare issues, and strategic expectations of each organization
- Develop consistent and shared key messages, covering a broad range of animal welfare basics, to avoid perpetuating consumer confusion and misinformation

3. Develop a national alternative to “cage-free”

- Retailers and food service outlets currently have two options: go cage-free or have their brand attacked by animal activist groups
- Canadian egg industry stakeholders can work together to develop a viable alternative, which includes animal welfare components as part of a broader and balanced strategy (ie: along with other components such as food safety, environment, traceability, consumer choice) for moving the industry forward in a sustainable manner

4. Expansion of mandatory national Animal Care Program

- Inclusion of more outcomes-based animal welfare measures

5. EFA's 2018 Operational Plan

- Inform the public about alternative hen housing systems (particular focus on furnished)
- Myth-busting to correct common misperceptions (ie: hormones/steroids in eggs)

Appendix 1 - Attendees

NAME	COMPANY
Amanda Brittain	BC Egg
Andy Yeh	A&W
Angela Griffiths	A&W
Angie Lang	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Aubrey Gibson	Clark's Poultry
Beatrice Visser	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Brandy Addai	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Brandy Street	British Columbia SPCA
Christine Kemp	Burnbrae Farms
Clover Bench	University of Alberta
Crystal Mackay	Canadian Center for Food Integrity
Dave Lastiwka	Egg Farmers of Alberta
David Webb	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Denis Frenette	Quebec Egg Board
Jenna Griffin	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Jennifer Lambert	Loblaws
Jerry Hofer	Fairview Colony
John Agar	Steinbach Hatchery
John Hofer	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Kari Buijs	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Ken Dean	Alberta SPCA
Ken Severson	Sparks Egg Farms
Leanne Cooley	Sparks Egg Farms
Lisa Hughes	A&W
Matt Sutton Vermeulen	The Context Network (facilitator)
Maureen Rossiter	Burnbrae Farms
Michele Pierce	A&W
Michelle Follensbee	Alberta Agriculture and Forestry
Murray Minchin	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Peter Waldner	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Shawn Nordin	Burnbrae Farms
Susan Gal	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Susan Schafers	Egg Farmers of Alberta
Tim Toews	Central Agri Systems
Tina Widowski	University of Guelph
Val Carney	Alberta Agriculture and Forestry