

Dr. D. Smith,
Director General,
Department of Agriculture and
Rural Affairs,
Box 4041, G.P.O.,
MELBOURNE. Vic. 3001

Dear Dr. Smith,

Our Association is extremely concerned at the possibility of the Department's services to the poultry industry in northern Victoria being downgraded. Therefore, we submit the following arguments for the continuation of a poultry extension service at Bendigo.

1. The Poultry Industry Officer at Bendigo is responsible for all of northern Victoria. In this area there are 40 per cent of Victoria's egg producers. These producers account for nearly 30 per cent of the State's egg production. They are all family farms for which their egg enterprises are a significant part of their income, and being family farms and not company operated they are not in the position to employ their own specialised staff. The majority of this group are grain producers who are going to rely more heavily on their egg enterprises in the next few years as the prospects for grain become less attractive.
2. There is a developing free range industry in the region with currently about 30 producers. Your Minister and the Egg Board are encouraging this but many of these people need regular on-the-spot help. This would not be available from people based in Melbourne.
3. There is a significant and expanding broiler industry around Bendigo. As you would be aware, these producers suffered severe setbacks recently with the Fowl Plague and they are going to need very close and constant advice to restore their enterprises. This will be a long-term thing.
4. In Bendigo, there is the Crystal Egg Company which annually packs 5 million dozen eggs (10% of State's total). Greg Parkinson has had a significant impact on helping to maintain the quality of the Company's eggs. For example, in the past 12 months, through constant and regular contacts he has helped this firm overcome problems of fungal contamination of eggs, chemical contamination and a condition known as watery whites. These problems have only been overcome because the Department has an enthusiastic, well-trained officer on the spot.

4 December 83

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5. There are two large poultry breeder farms in the district (Fantasy Farms and Allied Poultry Breeders) who use and value the services of a locally placed expert.

6. The Minister has announced as part of his Government's policy that the Department is to concentrate on industries that have export potential. He specifically named other poultry species such as pheasants and quail as industries with this potential.

In recent years, we have seen the development of two pheasant farms, three duck-egg farms, a quail farm and one squab/pigeon place. We feel there is a lot of potential for these industries in this area but it will be dependent on having access to expert advice on the spot.

We feel it is vital that the Department continue to provide services to the poultry industry. The above points highlight the many and varied facets of the job of a poultry industry officer.

The effectiveness of this officer is mainly dependent on establishing local contacts and quickly responding to local needs.

A Melbourne based extension service would have no hope of providing this level of service.

Therefore, we request that a poultry extension officer, continue to be stationed at Bendigo to most effectively service the needs of a significant number of local producers.

K. FITZGIBBON,

Strathfieldsaye P.O.
via Bendigo. 3551.

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Minister for Agriculture