

CONTRIBUTION FROM COMMERCIAL EGG PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL SUPPLEMENT IN BENDIGO ADVERTISER.

16th June, 1988

The Commercial Egg Producers' Association has two branches operating in the Bendigo area, with branches also at Murrabit, Wedderburn and Euroa. The Association looks after the interests of the larger producers right down to the small producers throughout Northern Victoria. We negotiate with the Egg Marketing Board for a just and reasonable return for poultry farmers.

This Association is also a united voice for the concerns and interests of poultry farmers in general helping them to develop a worthwhile industry.

About 15 years ago the Egg Industry in the Bendigo district produced 62% or about 2/3 of the State's Egg production. In 1988 that figure has dropped to 16%. The present picture of the egg industry is not very encouraging.

The poultry industry has witnessed many changes in the last few years, most farmers are now using trolleys to transport eggs to the Grading Floor, the introduction of new grades of eggs - free range and wholemeal giving the housewife a wider selection. There has been a general improvement in the quality of eggs which has been brought about by the stricter controls enforced by the Board. If producers fail to reach these standards they are penalised and drop back to a reduced return.

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Since the appointment of the Prices Commissioner in 1985 producers have been under constant pressure to accept a lower return for their product. The Prices Commissioner has proposed an ideal operating model farm of which there is none in Victoria and he has based his figures on that farm. The Government accepted his findings and instructed the Egg Board to reduce eggs by 12 cents per dozen, this was accomplished without any delay, which placed producers under enormous financial difficulty. He has proposed a further reduction of 5 cents per dozen this year, this astounds producers as feed alone has risen by 35% in the last 12 months.

Until the Government of this State and the Egg Marketing Board

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The Commercial Egg Producers Co-Operative formed approximately 35 years ago and operated for a few years from Mr. Fred Boys store in High Street, Golden Square on a "cash for order" basis for wheat, meat-meal etc.

Once established Co-op moved to premises in Queen Street and traded there for approximately a further 6-7 years.

Business boomed and Directors decided to buy freehold property in Stanley Street, where we are still trading today. Doors were opened for business on 3rd August, 1963.

Except for one set-back a fire which gutted the premises in 1968, the Co-op has steadily progressed under policies adopted by Directors and Management.

C.E.P.A. Co-op as it is now known, was originally started by poultry farmers for poultry farmers, but over the years we have had to diversify and now supply poultry farmers - pig - sheep - cattle - wheat and hobby farmers, and is owned by all shareholders of the Co-operative. It is a non-profit organisation, after operating on small margins any profit is distributed to the members as a rebate pro-rata.

Although Co-op membership has steadily grown the sad part is the fact that as at the day of the fire in 1968 there were 540 shareholders who were all poultry farmers. Today you could nearly count the bigger poultry farmers on your fingers. From 62% of Victoria's production down to 16% is need for concern, and if Governments continue with present and past policies we may see the day when poultry farms will be run by one or two multi-nationals which is against every aspect of Australian way of life - 'A fair go for everyone'. Controls must be placed on products such as meat-meal to guarantee supply to local markets, export prices inflate local prices and in some cases this is the last straw that will break the camel's back.

Co-op employs 7 permanent staff plus a carrier for delivery of goods. Also Co-op buys off as many of our members as possible re wheat - oats - hay - corn etc.