

SUSTAINABILITY A JOURNEY BEGINS

Starting in 2015, Egg Farmers of Alberta (EFA) has taken new approaches to help consumers increase their understanding of egg production, how hens are cared for and how production affects the environment.

Fifty years ago, many Albertans had some kind of connection to a farm; people were farmers themselves, or had farming roots just a generation or two away.

Alberta has a proud farming heritage, but today its population is overwhelmingly urban.

Today's consumer bases their food consumption and purchases on product quality and production practices that support shared values for animal health and welfare, safety and environment. EFA decided it needed to let consumers know how they were meeting their needs.

In 2014, the EFA undertook discussions with consumers, stakeholders and animal welfare groups to determine where information gaps and opportunities lay in talking to customers and Albertans.

EFA investigated opportunities to narrow the gap in understanding between producers and consumers. Their idea, according to General Manager Susan Gal, was to share more information.

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“We had started to see that some of the trust between consumers and farmers had eroded,” says Gal. “We decided that it was important for us to tell our story.”

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“We want consumers to know we’re committed to doing the best job possible,” says Susan Schafers, a second generation egg farmer and EFA Board Chair who owns a free-run operation of 7000 hens near Stony Plain. “As farmers, we are very focused on our birds, our eggs and our businesses.”

Muneer Gilani’s family has been part of the Alberta egg industry since 1976, both as farmers and as owners of Sparks Egg Grading Station, which grades and processes roughly half of all the eggs produced in the province. “Consumers want to know what’s involved with farming practices and food production. As society also moves away from having a background in agriculture, there’s more of a disconnect between farmers and consumers,” says Gilani who is also a board member for EFA.

From these stakeholder engagements, a set of issues emerged that will be the focus of discussions over the next few years. These include hen housing, animal welfare, producer profitability, environmental stewardship and food safety.

HEALTHY BIRDS

HEALTHY FARMS HEALTHY EGGS

HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Three pillars of sustainability

In January 2015, based on the research and discussions with stakeholders, EFA launched its first-ever Sustainability Strategy. The strategy defines sustainable egg production as socially responsible, environmentally sound and economically viable. It commits the organization to engage with key stakeholders, deliver accountability and transparency and integrate work processes to improve efficiency along the egg value chain.

At the heart of the strategy are three pillars: Healthy Birds, Healthy Eggs and Healthy Farms and Communities. Each pillar is linked to at least two key result areas where results will be monitored and shared with stakeholders.

The strategy will better position Alberta egg farmers to meet increasing expectations around sustainability from retailers and consumers. At the heart of this strategy is that consumers want to know where their food comes from, and producers need to engage with them to gain their understanding and trust.

In Alberta, over 160 farms produce eggs for over 4 million consumers annually.