



HUMANE SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL



MEDIA RELEASE 25 August 2010

Concern over intensive egg production in Australia

The Australian Egg Corporation Ltd (AECL), Australia's leading egg industry producer owned company, has reported on the recent egg recall across the U.S. due to *Salmonella enteritidis* contamination from an intensive egg production farm in Iowa. The U.S. outbreak has now reported nearly 2000 cases of human infection, with the recall occurring across up to 14 states and recalling up to 380 million eggs.

Whilst the AECL recognised concern for the outbreak, as *S. enteritidis* bacteria transferred from hens develops *within* eggs and has the potential to affect humans through egg consumption, what was not addressed by them was the potential for a similar outbreak to occur in Australia.

Reason for concern should not be isolated to the U.S. Earlier this month Humane Society International's U.S. partners, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), released a [white paper](#) addressing the threat that cage confinement of laying hens can pose to food safety. The paper revealed that there were 43% lower odds of *S. enteritidis* contamination in cage-free barns, where hens are raised indoors, than in cage production.

S. enteritidis is present on the Federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's (DAFF) most recent *National Notifiable Animal Diseases List*, and has been recognized by the Queensland Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries as *...a notifiable disease of poultry with public health significance*. It has been specifically noted by the Department of Health as a serious concern for primary industry due to risks of infections in egg-laying poultry. In 2004, there was a reported *S. enteritidis* outbreak in Queensland.

Regular monitoring of *S. enteritidis* by OzFoodNet, a State and Territory collaborative initiative run by the Department of Health and Ageing, reported that in 2008 all states and territories (except the ACT) reported locally acquired cases, of which 16% (81/511) of all reported *S. Enteritidis* infections were locally-acquired, which was higher than previous years. The years between 2003 and 2007 reported an average of 44 locally-acquired cases per year.

With previous cases being reported in Australia, and new reports to prove that intensive farming increases the chance of Salmonella outbreaks, there is reason for concern.

To add, with the Heart Foundation very recently increasing the weekly recommended intake of eggs, there is even more cause for concern for future intensive egg production in Australia and the health risks it will have.

"To continue to intensively produce eggs when we are fully aware of the risks would be irresponsible. Stricter standards must be put in place to prevent potential outbreaks amongst both poultry and human populations." said HSI director, Verna Simpson. *"At the very least, method of production labeling for eggs should be mandatory, so consumers can assess the health risks themselves."*

Phil Westwood, spokesman for the Free Range Egg and Poultry Association of Australia Inc. (FREPA), highlights that *"True free range egg production provides a healthy and sustainable farm environment, which together with good flock management and handling procedures ensures food safety for consumers"*.