



Australian Eggs

CASE STUDY



When Rowan McMonnies took the role of Managing Director at Australian Eggs in 2016, the egg industry was under scrutiny over a number of issues, including the definition of free range, welfare concerns over cage egg production and compliance issues.

Adding to this, critics of agricultural practices and processes were growing in their ability to generate noise and attention by mobilising mainstream media to communicate their concerns.

As an incoming MD new to the business and the industry, Rowan together with his team recognised the need to look to long-term sustainability as well as resolving the immediate issues facing the industry.

“We felt that working towards long-term sustainability and particularly, engaging with and contributing to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals was the best way forward for our industry – to guide continuous improvement and future-proof the industry,” said Rowan.

“We realised that there was no point in pursuing this if we didn’t have an effective community engagement mechanism that allowed us to be proactive instead of reactive to issues as they arose.

“A number of other industries had sustainability frameworks at that time but they were more industry focused. We saw a need for the process to be two sided – taking the perspectives of the community and feeding them into industry – then taking industry developments and feeding them back to the community. When we explored how to do this we learnt that other sectors had considerable experience and it was all based around processes to build community trust,” he said.

Rowan and his team undertook a consultation process with the egg industry, to ensure an understanding of the process they intended to undertake – to uncover the key issues relating to the industry amongst the Australian community, in a public and transparent way, and ultimately begin to engage and respond on those issues.

In 2018 Australian Eggs launched the Australian Egg Industry Sustainability Framework and engaged CSIRO to undertake community research over a three-year period to help them understand issues contributing to trust and ultimately, acceptance of the industry. This social science research process is distinct to consumer research, because it asks questions from a range of different angles to really drill down to the issues, and is not linked to purchasing or ‘consumer’ behaviour – it is all about perceptions and opinions and ultimately, trust.

Path modelling was then used to determine what the key issues and drivers of trust were for the egg industry – the extent to which it is well regulated, the extent to which it’s responsive to community expectations and the extent to which the benefits outweigh the costs.



“Understanding the key drivers of trust for any industry or business is essentially the recipe for success – by acting on these three key areas, we can and will impact positively on community trust,” said Rowan.

“So once we had the results of the first year of research, this formed the backbone of our Sustainability Framework. We were able to take the priority issues identified by the community and develop ways to progress them with a view to reporting back on progress in an annual cycle.

“The value of the Sustainability Framework lies in this ongoing engagement process that has the ability to build understanding between the public and the egg industry and contribute toward the common goal of ongoing improvement. Importantly, by providing an accurate factual footing on priority issues, the Sustainability Framework facilitated more productive engagement with industry stakeholders as well. It delivered the recipe for success and changed our conversations to how we could enhance industry sustainability by better aligning with the community.

The Sustainability Framework has been used by the Australian egg industry and Australian Eggs to guide investment in research, development and extension and on-farm practice change to ensure continuous improvement.

“The Sustainability Framework process has been enormously successful from the egg industry’s perspective, and hopefully from a community perspective as well. By engaging directly with the community, the egg industry has been able to decouple important sustainability issues from the media cycle and obtain a much clearer sense of mainstream community expectations.

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Key steps to building trust and acceptance



Look beyond industry perspectives and objectives to the external environment



Identify the community audience that is or will impact industry outcomes



Invest in independent social-science research to understand community expectations – this is not consumer/brand tracking



Be prepared to be transparent and vulnerable to feedback on industry impacts as well as contributions



Use the research to focus on the community priorities that drive trust and acceptance



Drive industry action that is responsive these priorities and demonstrate that improvement to the community



Repeat this community engagement process over time to refine priorities as they evolve

