

GAZETTE

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HUGE POULTRY LOSSES IN HEATWAVE

Poultry farmers in the Hawkesbury District lost thousands of valuable birds in last week's heatwave.

Not one chicken meat or egg producer escaped and many were so severely hit that disposal of huge mounds of carcasses added to their problems.

Some farmers had to hire backhoes or use bulldozers to dig holes large enough to bury dead birds before they became a health problem.

Mr Alex Schembri, of Laymore started pullet farm at Vineyard, lost almost 3000 birds which he valued at around \$8000.

It cost him \$45 to dump them at Baulkham Hills tip which seemed to just rub salt in the wound, Mr Schembri said.

Mr Schembri, like many of the local farmers who spoke to this paper said they weren't as badly off as some growers but he thought that the effects of the heatwave on the industry should be acknowledged as a natural disaster on government level.

"When other primary industries are hit with severe losses, the government does something about it," he said.

WATER PRESSURE DROP

Another problem that he and many others on town water supply faced during the heat was the drop in water pressure.

The water pressure has to be maintained to keep misters and sprays working effectively in the sheds.

During the hottest part of the day, people were watering lawns and gardens without knowing that the resulting demand on water was in fact causing the death of many birds, Mr Schembri said.

Mr Phillip Armstrong, of the Poultry Research Station at Seven Hills, said that this was one of the biggest problems faced by the poultry farmers.

Most farmers, knowing what heat can do to birds, had taken precautions, but the extreme temperatures, and lack of water pressure proved too much, he said.

Mr T. Cragg, an egg producer at McGraths Hill said that his 40 years experience in the industry paid off during the crisis.

He was able to keep misters and water sprays going throughout the worst part of the heatwave and he lost only 300 from 25,000 birds.

Although the birds are worth \$3 each, Mr Cragg considers himself fortunate that his farm was comparatively lightly affected.

It is not only the loss of stock which will create financial problems in the industry.

The heat has badly affected egg production.

Mr Armstrong explained that the birds that survive go off their feed during the

heat, egg production slumps and shells are thin, making the eggs difficult to market.

This problem can last for weeks after a heatwave, he said.

One small egg producer who really suffered was J. E. Windberg, of Tennyson.

Mrs Windberg said they lost 300 young layers out of their quota of 5000.

They had only moved to the area a year ago; were still paying off their quota (the Egg Marketing Board's quota system controls egg production by restricting the number of birds that can be kept; quotas can cost up to \$13.50 a bird); had just paid for the birds they lost and had recently installed new cages and insulation.

"Had we lost the numbers that some did, we would not have been able to keep going," Mrs Windberg said.

"It was a real blow," she added.

They were not allowed to dump their birds at their local tip and hired a backhoe to bury them.

MOST SUSCEPTIBLE

With the heavy losses in the stocks of breeder birds, layers will not be able to be replaced for some time.

Dad used to supply Mr T Cragg (Tommy) with started pullets.

Formerly located opposite Lynwood Golf Club