

Open-range egg farmer ordered to cut production

By SUE MORGAN

A Sydney open-range egg producer says he has been told to cut back on production – even though he cannot keep up with the demand for his eggs.

Mr Alec Schembri with all NSW egg producers has been ordered by the Egg Corporation to cut his hen numbers by 10 per cent.

The corporation ordered the cut because it has been losing up to \$10 million a year due to massive over-production.

Mr Schembri says he is one of two open-range egg producers servicing the Sydney metropolitan area.

“I have been knocking back requests from shops at the rate of three a day because I haven’t got enough eggs and now I have been told to cut my production because overall there are surplus eggs” he said. “I have got to keep in line because of the cage farmers.”

Mr Schembri’s business, Open Range Country Style Egg Producers at Vineyard, will have to get rid of 850 birds to comply with the corporation’s order. He will then have to ration out the eggs, cutting the supply to shops by five per cent.

He has already dropped 20 out of 70 shops from his round because of the cut. Mr Schembri estimated he would lose about \$200 a week because of the reduction.

“Some of his customers expressed concern about the cut and some shop owners said they would take up a petition, he said.

“Some have even said that if they cannot get open-range eggs then they won’t buy any at all. That’s not really very good thinking from the corporation. They realise, but it (open range egg production) is something they just don’t want to catch on. “They would not worry about what sort of eggs they sell as long as they sell eggs”.

The managing director of the NSW Egg Corporation, Mr Ken Baxter said last night there were two or three “genuine” open-range egg producers supplying the Sydney area. Others sold eggs from road-side stalls and backyards.

Demand fluctuated between two and three million eggs a year but he could not estimate supply numbers because of questions surrounding the producers. He could not say whether open-range producers would be disadvantaged or not by the production cut.

Asked if a special allowance could be made for them, he replied: “I think if you apply a rule to one, you apply it to all”.

