



Ethical eggs for quality

Happy hens lay booming business

■ Tari Jeffers

QUALITY over quantity is the mantra behind Manjimup egg producers who have set themselves high targets for ethical practices.

CharCol Springs has been operating in the region since late 2014 as pastured egg producers.

Their 2500 hens are separated by age into huge pens for them to roam around freely in between laying eggs.

Owners Charlie and Coleen Roberts said the pens were moved every two days so the hens had fresh land to graze on.

"It takes 17 weeks to move the pens across the available 26.3ha, and that's for each of the four pens," Charlie said.

Coleen said by separating the hens by their age, it allowed for different sized eggs and also allowed them to sell off their hens when they reached 18 months old.

"We sell them on as "backyard" chickens as part of our ethical farming," she said.

"We have a waiting list and we end up selling 400 hens at a time.

"We actually have a sale coming up in the first week of February."

Having pastured eggs means the hens have their sizeable pen to graze throughout the day and of their own accord lay an egg into the trailer provided.

Coleen said there was extensive training involved in getting the hens to learn how to lay properly.

"We don't sell eggs that are on the ground, that's not what premium eggs are to us," she said.

"When we have new hens, I'll be out here at 4.30am watching them and routinely put them in the nest box when they look ready to lay.

"You can change their behaviour after about three



Charlie and Coleen Roberts with their sons Jack, 8, and Harry, 6, with some of their 2500 hens used in their pastured egg business CharCol Springs.
Picture: Tari Jeffers

attempts but those we can't, we sell on."

Charlie said the benefits of taking such care of their chickens was their push for premium eggs.

"Our model also does wonders for soil regeneration, we've seen incredible results in our pastures after the hens have been through," he said.

"It spreads out manure and does seed germination."

In just over three years of operating, CharCol Springs has established itself as a boutique and artisan producer that already has traction in the Perth market.

Of CharCol Springs' eggs, 80 per cent are sent to Perth, where they are sold in select IGA stores, used in restaurants and even used at Parliament House.

In Manjimup, CharCol Springs eggs are available at the Cherry Box, Manjimup Meat Mart and the Manjimup Farmers Market, in addition to farm gate sales.

Coleen said several restaurants in Manjimup also used their eggs.

"We also donate eggs to Moonya and when we have excess, we also donate them to the hospital, who supply Silver Chain," she said.

In addition to donating eggs to

worthy causes, CharCol Springs is also involved in the community by sponsoring a rider in motocross and one in speedway.

According to Charlie, 2018 will be about fine-tuning their rotational programs and models and potentially expanding their market.

"We want more locals to know we're here," he said.

"We do want to expand, but not at the cost of our quality; we would not want to produce more eggs with less quality."

At CharCol Springs' current capacity, Charlie and Coleen

already employ three casual employees year round, two for the packing and grading shed and one as general farm maintenance.

Charlie said there was room to expand to 5000 hens, but it would include a lot of planning.

There was a lot to be proud of, according to Charlie and Coleen however, as their business also provided some memorable time with their sons Jack, 8, and Harry, 6.

All this from an operation that started out with about 1500 chickens in November, 2014.



MANJIMUP COMBINED WEANER SALE

Tuesday 16th January 2018 (Not commencing before 1.30pm)

Further nominations invited.

Please contact Cameron Harris 0429 680 334