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What's hatching in training and extension in the Australian chicken meat industry

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The Australian chicken meat industry contributes over \$2.8 billion/year to the economy and directly employs more than 58,000 people. Including approximately 720 contract chicken growers. The percentage of total chickens slaughtered in 2020 (663 873 900) by state was NSW 32%, Vic 20%, Qld 20% and SA, WA and Tas combined 28%. Baiada Poultry and Inghams Enterprises supply approximately 70% of Australia's meat chickens (Australian Chicken Meat Federation). The objectives of the *Training and extension for the Australian chicken meat industry* project is to develop and provide ongoing extension and training for the industry. The project is focused on delivering outcomes of AgriFutures Australia research and development (R&D) projects, improving engagement with industry and adoption of research, and developing a national training framework. The project is funded by AgriFutures Australia and delivered by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. This paper summarises some of the project highlights to date.

Outcomes and outputs of R&D projects are delivered through various methods including industry webinars, newsletters, facilitating the development of industry tools from R&D, fact sheets, the *Chicken meat RD&E* website, YouTube and podcast channels. An initial scoping study of national and international training providers, materials and activities combined with industry and training provider interviews led to the development of a training needs survey, an online interactive animal welfare training pilot and online biosecurity training activity. The project team consult regularly with the Chicken Meat Advisory Panel which is also the project steering committee.

Project highlights to date include the: national training needs survey, animal welfare training pilots, development of an online biosecurity training activity, industry webinars, *Research RoundUp* newsletter, *Chicken meat RD&E* website, and online *Poultry legislation search tool*. A national chicken meat industry training needs survey for growers, breeder and hatchery managers, livestock service managers and veterinarians was conducted in 2020. The responses provided valuable insight into industry wide training priorities and preferred delivery. The top three topics identified by growers were (i) ventilation, (ii) work health and safety, and weighted equally at (iii) biosecurity planning | brooding | health and diseases | litter and spent litter management. A similar survey for chicken meat processors is planned for 2022. Two online, interactive animal welfare training pilots were developed and delivered by 4 Up Skilling Pty Ltd in early 2021. Feedback from both pilots was positive and will help inform future training activities. An online training activity *Introduction to farm biosecurity for chicken growers* was also developed and is currently being reviewed by industry.

The 12 industry webinars held to date have showcased 30 AgriFutures projects by 25 individual presenters, had 1407 registrations (6–21% from overseas) and 791 participants (i.e. a 56% average attendance rate). The topics covered include litter management, nutrition, gut health, water and energy, environmental sustainability, biosecurity and bird behaviour. Webinar poll results from 2021 show that on average 41% of respondents found the information very useful, 47% found it useful, 52% are likely and 26% very likely to use the information in their business, and 100% are interested in attending more webinars. *Research RoundUp* is a targeted selection of recently published journal articles related to chicken meat production. It is emailed monthly to over 100 subscribers, predominantly researchers and company staff. A subscriber satisfaction survey is currently underway. The *Chicken meat RD&E* website was refreshed in 2020 and there has been a positive trend in website metrics since. In 2021, there were 6309 pageviews by 2506 users of the site – a 154% increase in the number of users, a 108% increase in sessions and a 50% increase in pageviews from 2020. The *Poultry legislation search tool* pulls together the various legislation, standards and guidelines related to biosecurity, animal welfare and food safety for the chicken meat industry into a single, easy to search location. Published in October 2020, the tool had 296 page views and 273 unique pageviews in 2021. Two more new online tools are in development.

While not a replacement for face-to-face engagement and activities, the online delivery of information, tools and training via electronic methods has been well received. It provides additional options for people to access information, tools and researchers. Opportunities to improve the project include clearly segmenting our client groups, gaining more direct feedback from them, and implementing ongoing feedback loops. There are also opportunities to better communicate and promote these options, plus increase the number and type of offerings consistent with client feedback (Coutts J&R). COVID's restrictions have been challenging and we are all looking forward to being able to meet and work together in person more.

References

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