

## Canada's Egg Farmers Welcome Change

**August 22, 2008**—Working in one of the country's most dynamic agriculture industries, Canada's egg farmers have had little time to rest. Just ask Laurent Souigny, 64, a proud egg farmer and chairman of the national egg farmers' organization, Egg Farmers of Canada (EFC).

It's been quite the ride for Laurent, who operated a dairy farm before getting started in the egg business with his wife Hélène in the early 1980s in Prescott County, just east of Ottawa. Since selling his dairy farm 16 years ago, Laurent has concentrated exclusively on eggs and his flock has grown to about 20,000 hens. These days, he raises white leghorns, a white-feathered bird weighing between 3.5 to 4 pounds capable of producing on average 320 eggs a year. Laurent and his family also grow crops such as corn, soya beans and wheat on their 1,300 acre farm.

When his first young hens arrived on October 5, 1982, "it was a big day for us," he recalls. "Looking back, we were getting involved in something entirely different from dairy, which is something I was born and raised with." To help get the operation off to a smooth start, Laurent relied on the expertise and advice of his brother Gerry, himself a former egg farmer. Twenty-six years later, his new hens come from the same pullet grower just a stone's throw from the farm.

Canada's modern egg industry bears little resemblance to that which existed in the tumultuous days of the 1950s and 60s before supply management. "Egg prices were very low at that time, resulting in low incomes for farmers," Laurent explains. "One of my uncles farmed in those days, and I remember he would earn between 18 and 20 cents a dozen, well below the cost of production. It wasn't easy—many were forced out of the business altogether."

Those who survived did their best to produce high-quality eggs at a time when there were few regulations. "Since then things have changed dramatically," he says. "It's one of the reasons we have supply management—because it gives a fair return to egg producers in my community and across Canada."

Over the past two decades, there has also been a real push by farmers within the industry to improve production practices, heighten food safety and strengthen the trust they enjoy with their customers. When Laurent first started, his hens laid about 22 dozen eggs a year. Today that number is nearly 25 dozen, the result of research and superior breeding. Hen housing is also much improved. It's cleaner with better ventilation and more space for the hens.

Laurent says it's a thrill to walk through the barn listening to his hens. "They're always excited to see me when I come around to check on feed and water." For Canadian egg farmers like Laurent, the number one priority is the care and well-being of their laying hens. "Our livelihood depends on it and it's the right thing to do."

In Canada, regulated egg farmers are rated on the industry's animal welfare and food safety programs. "I think this is good news for egg lovers, and especially for people looking for a natural, healthy source of protein at a reasonable cost. And now that some of the myths about eggs and cholesterol are being dispelled, we're starting to see a steady increase in consumption."

One of the biggest responsibilities of farmers is keeping flocks healthy and free from disease. "Strict on-farm biosecurity is crucial. We have to make sure no one brings an illness into the barn that could infect our hens," says Laurent. Egg farmers are on the front lines of disease prevention in Canada. They are also first responders in the event of any trouble with their flocks.

In his community, Laurent is observing a number of young men and women taking up the reins of egg farming from their parents along with new producers entering the business. He is proud to see so many young egg farmers in his area, noting they're especially dedicated to the industry and are very interested in what they're doing. "They understand that if it's managed properly, egg farming can be a very rewarding career."

In addition to his responsibilities on the farm, Laurent also serves as the chairman of Egg Farmers of Canada and has done so for the past eight years. "Yes, it can be quite busy, and I have to be open to discuss just about anything with various members of the industry—we're really no different than a big family," he says with a smile. "A few disagreements here and there, but ultimately we agree on things. But I'm always prepared to work for what I think is best for the future." When asked about life after farming, Laurent says he hopes to be remembered as an honest person who was fair, ready to listen and very dedicated to the industry.

On August 25, Egg Farmers of Canada marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter in its history with the launch of a new corporate identity. Formerly known as the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency (CEMA), the organization is moving forward with a name Laurent feels better reflects the make-up of its membership: "I think it comes at a good time, because when you talk to people, they have a lot of respect for farmers. With the CEMA name, which we've had since 1972, there were always some misconceptions that we may have been a government institution. But with Egg Farmers of Canada, there's no mistaking the fact we're farmer-led and farmer-driven. That's who we really are."

When it comes to how he likes his eggs, Laurent is quick to respond: "I like them poached, about three every morning, on toast, with a little salt and pepper." When his two children and four grandchildren are visiting, Hélène makes egg burgers: "it's quick and easy and a real favourite at our place."

*Laurent Souigny invites you to try a tasty egg burger (see recipe) and to visit the Egg Farmers of Canada website for more eggs-cellent recipes and information about eggs: [www.eggs.ca](http://www.eggs.ca)*

### **Egg Burger**

**Method:** Heat a skillet to medium heat. Melt 1 tablespoon (15 ml.) of butter in skillet. Break 1 egg into the skillet. Stir gently to break the yolk and mix it a bit with the white. Season the egg with salt and pepper. When the egg is set, turn it and cook the other side. Place 1 cheese slice on the bottom half of a warmed or toasted hamburger bun and place the fried egg on top. Garnish it with tomato, lettuce, cooked mushrooms, red or green peppers, crisp cooked bacon, pickles, relish or ketchup. Cover with remaining half of bun. Enjoy!

