



Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF) Inc

EMBARGOED: Monday, 23rd July 2007

SCHOOL KIDS BUST URBAN CHICKEN MYTH

An experiment conducted by students from James Ruse Agricultural High School in Carlingford, NSW has busted a commonly-held belief about Australian chickens.

The Year 10 school students compared the growth of chickens bred to lay eggs with chickens bred for meat and found that over six weeks the meat chickens grew four times bigger than the egg chickens.

The research debunks the commonly held misconception that the larger size and better growth rates of the chickens we eat today is due to the use of hormones. Last year, research released by the Australian Chicken Meat Federation (ACMF) revealed that almost 80% of Australians believe that something, for example growth hormones, is added to Australian chickens to make them grow artificially larger¹, despite the fact that hormones have not been used in the production of meat chickens in Australia for over 40 years

“It’s not hormones, antibiotics or genetic modification making chickens larger but best practice in traditional breeding. The truth is far less dramatic as was proven by this recent school project,” said Dr Andreas Dubs, Executive Director of the Australian Chicken Meat Federation.

The school sourced 15 egg-laying chickens and 15 meat chickens as day old chicks from a commercial supplier, and the students hand raised them. All chickens were fed the same standard chicken feed product, made mostly from cereal grains and protein sources, obtained from a local feed supplier. The chickens were checked every day and weighed regularly for a period of six weeks. At the end of the six week period, the average weight of the chickens bred for egg laying was 592g while the chickens bred for meat was more than four times larger, weighing in at 2,388g.

Lisle Brown, Head Teacher of Agriculture at James Ruse Agricultural High School, said the students enjoyed busting a common myth, one which some had probably held themselves. “This project enabled the students to observe first hand the great effect selective breeding has

¹ *Commissioned by The Australian Chicken Meat Federation and conducted by Galaxy Research from a national sample of 1,100 respondents aged 16 years and older (Weekend Omnibus 5-7 May and 19-21 May 2006)*

on the growth and development of chickens and enabled our students to see how the meat chicken industry in Australia is able to produce the large volume of chicken meat we eat today," he said.

"Students were also able to put into practice all the elements that make a good reliable scientific experiment, such as randomisation, replication, standardisation and control."

Selective breeding is a process of developing a breed of bird to have particular characteristics by choosing to mate only the best cockerels – that is, those that demonstrate the desired characteristics, such as those which grow better, are healthier or have more meat - with the best hens.

The great grandparents of the chickens we eat in Australia today were bred overseas using conventional genetic selection techniques and were imported into Australia as fertile eggs. The next generations (the grandparents, parents and ultimately the meat chickens reared for eating) are then bred and grown on farms here in Australia.

Selective breeding is different from genetic modification. There are no genetically modified chickens in Australia.

"If people want to know more about how we produce chicken meat in Australia, I'd recommend they visit our website www.chicken.org.au or call our 'Chook Infoline'.....1300 4 CHOOKS (1300 424 665)," concluded Dr Dubs.



Caption: Typical meat chicken (behind) and egg layer chicken (front) at six weeks of age fed the same diet and monitored daily from day old chicks.

ENDS

This release was prepared by Reed Weir Communications on behalf of the Australian Chicken Meat Industry.

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If your school has appropriate facilities to look after chickens, has had previous experience in keeping chickens, and has someone with suitable experience with raising chickens to supervise this project, please contact Dr Vivien Kite at the ACMF Tel: 02 9929 4077 to receive an information sheet on how you can run the same project.