

# 886 Chickens at the Bed and Breakfast with Lou Mitzy Episode 7

## Transcription:

**Daniel:** Daniel OBrien here, welcome back to [Greengrassseggfarming.com](http://Greengrassseggfarming.com). My special guest today is Lou Mitzy, welcome to the call.

**Lou:** How are you Daniel?

**Daniel:** Very well, I think we're gonna have some fun today, I've known Lou for a while now and what can I say? You are a funny man so if nothing else, we're just gonna have a lot of fun.

**Lou:** I'm gonna be serious today.

**Daniel:** Alright! Ok today I just wanna talk about your farm, you've got a couple of chicken caravans and you've got a bed and breakfast on that but just start by telling me where your farm is located and what size is your farm?

**Lou:** We're located at West Gippsland a little town called Fumina South which is at the base of the mount Baw Baw foothills, we're just below the snowline so it's an unusual property with regards to where we're located, most farms tend to be on the flats. We're very hilly and very cold, very wet. We bought 150 acres where 120 acres is full of bush, lots of bush and the 30 acres is where we farm with the two Chicken Caravans.

**Daniel:** Yeah right, I do remember when I was down there, as you said it's wet and cold, that is my memory of your farm, I think I spend 1 day and 1 night there and I packed snow gear, not because that I was going to snow but I know that west Gippsland and the whole Gippsland region can get cold and it was cold and windy and wet. What's your current temperature there today?

**Lou:** 5 degrees and since last night we had about 42 millimetres of rain.

**Daniel:** For those of you who are listening to this recording, we're recording this in about mid June so you would expected it to be cold. So on your farm you've also got a bed and breakfast, there's some cabins on it that you built, is that right?

**Lou:** That's right, we've got 3 cabins which cater to basically the snow guests who go up to mount Baw Baw and I built those myself a few years ago and it's been running smoothly. I can show you a lot of the guests bring their kids, they love looking at the chickens when they come up they find it extremely fascinating so it's great.

**Daniel:** Yeah ok and how long ago did you get your first flock of chickens?

**Lou:** First flock arrived on 19th of August last year and they still with us and the second flock arrived on Anzac day this year so they are in a young pullets but they're laying extremely well also, it's great – we have an average about 850 to 900 eggs a day.

**Daniel:** That's very good out of your 900 chooks, you've still got 900 all up?

**Lou:** 900 all up? Might be few less because we have a few losses to eagles, we have about 886 I think to be exact.

**Daniel:** Yeah ok, so other than eagles there's a lot of scrub on your land that other predators live around?

**Lou:** Well obviously foxes are always a concern but prior to the Chicken Caravan's arriving and the chooks arriving, we actually spent about a month eradicating foxes in their burrows. I don't have Maremma dogs, I have alpaca's and they tend to do a fantastic job keeping the foxes at bay. We have some issue of wild dogs but they have been eradicated also – that's a horrible thing to say but you've got to get rid of them. The main predators are eagles so there's nothing you can do about that, but I call it a bush tax. I tried numerous things to get rid of the eagles or try to stop them, like mirror balls hanging top of the caravan, but to no avail – they basically get ignored. I've actually introduced roosters now.

**Daniel:** And how does that work? I know that's what we've been talking about in the forum lately, adding roosters to the flock.

**Lou:** That's right well, these roosters have been caponized, in other words sterilized. The other day when the eagle did fly over, the rooster only been there two weeks, they did a big shriek and all of the chickens went under the caravan or in the caravan and the roosters jumped on top of the feeder box, looking really prepared, out making the warning call. They are ready to forfeit themselves rather than the chickens – I'd rather lose the rooster than the chooks.

**Daniel:** So tell me about what you just said, the roosters are sterile, is that right?

**Lou:** That's correct yes.

**Daniel:** How did you go about that?

**Lou:** The vet organizes that actually. It was really for the stigma. Most people, when you tell them you've got unsterilised rooster with the girls, people think that when they break an egg open they will find a chicken inside. It's really for the stigma and getting that out of the way, and with the roosters being sterile, I don't have any issues with that regard.

**Daniel:** Yeah right, actually I've never come across a vet that say's "Hey we can sterilise your dog, cat and your rooster".

**Lou:** They can do it, it's quite an amazing thing because the roosters testes are under each wing, would you believe?

**Daniel:** Yeah right, ok.

**Lou:** Which is quite unusual.

**Daniel:** Yeah, so he still struts around like a rooster and thinks he's a rooster.

**Lou:** He struts around and he does his business as he should and he looks after the girls, they are good watchdogs in a sense, or watch-roosters.

**Daniel:** Now it's interesting that the rooster had a go because I know that is very new, that is something that we are talking about on the forum, another farmer uses roosters to keep eagles at bay with quite a bit of success.

**Lou:** Yep, it seems to work.

**Daniel:** Yeah great, so of your land up on the hill there you got 30 acres of cleared pasture, is that right?

**Lou:** Thats correct Daniel yeah.

**Daniel:** And then you just cell graze your chicken around that area.

**Lou:** Yes, I mean because it's hilly and on the Chicken Caravan the nest boxes can be aligned inside so I tend to run across the bottom of the hill and level it up – the caravan can lean slightly but you can always adjust these boxes so that's not an issue.

**Daniel:** Yeah great, tell me about when you first started egg farming, what were some of the challenges or some of the big learning curves in those few months of having 450 chickens?

**Lou:** I have had chickens most my life with my parents being of a Greek heritage – we always had chickens. But getting 450 chickens in one hit, it was a bit of a struggle because number one they don't leave you alone and number two it's a bit daunting. When they start to go on the lay they are always laying in unusual spots so you have to collect eggs continuously, it's a bit of a challenge in that regard but once you get used to it it's fine. Some of them would sleep under the caravan on their first night out which means you have to collect a hundred chickens and put them back in again. That only lasts 2 or 3 days and after that they just settle in and they know where to go every night.

**Daniel:** Yeah, I found the same, I remember those first few nights thinking “What’s going on? Why won’t you go in?” and having visions of, “Am I going to be picking them all up for the next year?” As you said it only lasts two nights and then they all go “Cool this is where we go”.

**Lou:** Thinking back to my first Chicken Caravan, I think the first night it was 130+ girls outside, the second night was about 70, the third night was 22 and the fourth it was nothing so it was 3 days of marching around with a head torch out there in the elements but I got used to it pretty quickly. That was my main challenge, I had visions of exactly what you said, having to do that every night for another year. But now we’re very clever, very clever with the animals.

**Daniel:** So tell me, you were saying before that when your guests come to the bed and breakfast, they love the chickens. Tell me about that, like the interactions with the parents and the kids, what do they think of that?

**Lou:** I’ve got fencing to stop guest coming straight in the secondary poultry fence. As soon as the kids come up to the fence, all of the chickens will run over to them, they get so excited – even the alpaca’s will come up because they’re interested to see what’s going on with the chooks. The guest love it and they get fresh eggs, I supply them with fresh eggs every morning.

**Daniel:** They must love looking at the hens, running on the grass there and having some eggs and knowing they’re fresh and tasty.

**Lou:** Absolutely, when they’re leaving they tend to buy 4 or 5 dozen to take back to Melbourne or wherever they come from, it was a good sign.

**Daniel:** So how far is your farm out of Melbourne?

**Lou:** 21 and a half minutes from Melbourne on the freeway which is not too far at all, I think it’s 130 kilometers.

**Daniel:** And how far are you from the ski fields?

**Lou:** It’s a 40 minute drive up the mountain to the ski fields.

**Daniel:** Ok and that’s Baw Baw ski fields?

**Lou:** Yeah that’s Mt. Baw Baw which is a lovely family mountain.

**Daniel:** Yeah fantastic, so other than the chickens do you have any other livestock or what else happens on your farm there?

**Lou:** My neighbor runs about 80 head of cattle, he runs them through my paddocks whenever the grass is long and then after 4 days we run the chickens on the paddocks

after the cattle. They love going through all the cow paddocks and digging all them up which is great, it saves me money from fertilising the paddock, they do it for me.

**Daniel:** It's great, the disturbance they do, spreading the cow pats out so they're not only on one spot. And what have you found with the pasture? You're coming up to almost a year now of having chickens, have you noticed a difference in the pasture from before the chickens were there till now?

**Lou:** Absolutely, everywhere the chickens have been run you can just see the flat square 50 by 50 area which is a dark green grass which is fantastic.

**Daniel:** Yeah that's fantastic good to hear.

**Lou:** The farmer next door, he was putting chicken manure on his paddocks, I think he went through a 180 cubic meters of manure so tempted me to run on my caravan across his paddock too. Might be some potential for a few more caravans later on but yeah everybody can see the benefit and it's fantastic, you can get the benefit of selling the eggs and you get the benefit of great pasture.

**Daniel:** Yeah that's fantastic, so tell me about where you market your eggs, where do you sell your eggs to Lou?

**Lou:** We are collective between myself and two other farms so we wholesale all our eggs and they've got markets in Melbourne with a lot of high end restaurants and cafe's, I'm doing it all on a wholesale level but between these three farms I think we're producing over four thousand eggs a day so it's fantastic and we just count for demand is so great we can just make enough. We're always looking for other farmers who are interested in setting up as part of a collective because it would be great.

**Daniel:** And most of those eggs, they're just to Melbourne?

**Lou:** Most of it, it's Melbourne they get delivered to Melbourne every Thursday.

**Daniel:** Oh that's good, well Lou we'll have to catch up again on another podcast and talk about some of the technology things you're working on, I know you're working on some apps for egg tracking and also some automation on the chicken caravans but we won't give all that away right now, I think we will leave that for another podcast and you can explain how all that works.

**Lou:** Absolutely, it would be my pleasure.

**Daniel:** Well thank you so much for your time today Lou and we will talk soon.

**Lou:** Thank you Daniel take care.

**Daniel:** Will do.

