

Talking all things 'keep cartons' with Tobias and Amy Lehmann Podcast Episode

Description for <http://greengrassseggfarming.com>

Amy and Tobias from West Walla Farm chat to Daniel O'Brien about their 'keep cartons'. Amy and Tobias explain what their keep cartons are, how they came across the idea and what they're used for in the farming business. Plus, the three chat about the importance of sustainable farming practices.

Description for ChickenCaravan.com

Daniel O'Brien chats to Amy and Tobias from West Walla Farm about the importance of sustainable farming practices. Amy and Tobias chat about their inventive 'keep cartons', explaining what they are exactly, how they came across them and what they're used for on the farm.

Quotes:

"Keep cartons are a big win for the environment because there are less egg cartons and the customer gets to be environmentally conscious." - Tobias Lehmann

"We think that keep cartons are a very sustainable solution" - Tobias Lehmann

"I think keep cartons are a great initiative in so many aspects - environmentally, in marketing, in so many ways." - Daniel O'Brien

"I think it's exciting from a marketing point of view. Once a customer has got the eggs from you, and you're the only one doing keep cartons, when it's empty they can't get it filled up anywhere else." - Daniel O'Brien

"So, not only have we grown our business we are growing the business of the farmer's market as well by encouraging more people to come and shop." - Amy Lehmann

Transcript:

Daniel: Daniel O'Brien here, welcome back to Green Grass egg farming. Today I am talking to Amy and Tobias from West Walla Farm. Welcome, how are you guys?

Amy: We're great, Daniel. Thanks for having us.

Daniel: Today we are going to talk about 'keep cartons.' So, you've got egg cartons that are made of cardboard, that's pretty much how most of us buy eggs. You guys have got something else, I wanted you to talk me through these keep cartons, and what are they, and how did you come across them and how you implement them into your egg farm business.

Tobias: No problem Daniel, happy to talk about it. The keep carton idea - have you've done farmer's markets yourself in the past?

Daniel: Yes, certainly.

Tobias: I'm sure we've all been there where a lot of people bring back huge numbers of egg cartons back to you to be, you know, taken back so you can reuse them. As you know, in New South Wales in particular, you're not meant to reuse cardboard egg cartons. They are meant to be either composted or recycled. Everytime that happened it really broke our hearts - particularly when people would bring back a whole lot of competitors egg cartons, and our egg cartons, and everything, just trying to do the right thing for the environment. Amy got particularly frustrated about it and started researching a solution to that. What she came across was actually an existing product but not used in the way we're using. You know, you don't want to reinvent the wheel when the wheel is already being used as a table, so we decided to take that and augment that to use it for this. And the amazing idea is that they buy the keep carton from us and then we normally discount the first dozen with it. When they buy it with that and then they bring their keep cartons back and we keep a separate stack of eggs on a special tray's at the stall or the farmer's market and when they come up with their keep carton, we restock it, and then we normally discount the value of cardboard cartoons, then we take 50c off - which is probably actually more than the cardboard cartons cost.

Amy: Yeah, a little bit more.

Tobias: A little bit more, but because of that it means that it is pretty much cost neutral for us. It ends up being a win for the environment because there are less egg cartons and the customer gets to be environmentally conscious - everybody wins. Even though it would seem like normal conventional egg cartons aren't a huge environmental problem, we started doing some research into it and the average egg carton is anywhere between fifty-eight and sixty-two grams, so lets say sixty grams an egg carton. We go through twenty-four, I think when you then expedite that over the million dozen of eggs we use every single day in Australia and over the course of a year, we end up at twenty-four million tonnes of egg cartons. Now, even if the majority of that comes from recycled material or is then recycled that is still a whole lot of trees that at some stages had to be chopped down, or there's something better to be recycled into. We think that keep cartons are a very sustainable solution to that problem, because then you don't need to create the egg carton in the first place, then you don't have to recycle. That's kind of how the journey has gotten there.

Daniel: Tell me about the actual cartons; we're not talking about a cardboard cartons, what are these keep cartons made from?

Amy: They're a BPA-free plastic, so they are a plastic but it's a recyclable plastic. They've got a silicone seal so that they seal quite nicely. I suppose the best way to describe them would be; they're like tupperware, they're a very, very high-quality kitchen plasticware container. It's very

durable, it's dishwasher safe and designed to last for a very long time, and can be recycled when you are no longer using it.

Tobias: And you can get them wet. Unlike a conventional egg carton when they get wet they don't fall apart.

Daniel: Okay, so they can be washed and such. Are these cartons designed for eggs? They've been manufactured as egg containers.

Amy: Yes, they're manufactured as egg containers by a company called Lock and Lock who are a competitor of Rubbermaid and Tupperware. They are specially designed for keeping eggs and they easily fit up to an 800g size egg in them, which makes it very good for our customers who love their big eggs. They keep them safe on their journey home because they're designed for eggs.

Daniel: What was the response when you first brought these out into the marketplace at the farmer's market; how did people react?

Tobias: Well, we first of all got a great response from our local media about them. There was a lot of excitement locally. At our main farmer's market, which Amy does every week, which is the Riverina Producers Market in Wagga Wagga, there was a lot of interest. Some people originally were a little bit hesitant because they didn't want to pay a little bit extra initially. Then very quickly we found that our regulars that came every single week, after about the second or third week, thought it was a great idea, because they knew they were coming back every single week. They very quickly got on board.

Amy: Once people saw the quality of the product, so as I said it's a very high-quality manufactured product, once our regular customers saw how well it was manufactured they were happy to invest. We have a number of customers who have four keep cartons and they bring them back every week to be refilled. We've now sold well over two-hundred-and-fifty keep cartons, so most of those customer come back to have them refilled regularly.

Daniel: Wow, so we're not just talking about two-hundred-and-fifty cardboard cartoons not being used but they're not being used every week or every fortnight, they are now being replenished with eggs. So, now you're in the business of just selling eggs rather than selling eggs with packaging so you no longer have to pay for and handle packaging, the customer does that.

Amy: Yes, that's all up to the customer. It saves us time in packing as well because we can just sort straight onto trays and pack them into the keep cartons for the customer at the market.

Daniel: Something that a few people would be asking I'm guessing is with a cardboard cartoon, you buy it and it's got the use-by date on it, how do most of your customers handle the use-by

date, or are they sort of going through the eggs each week so it doesn't make a difference. Is that an issue at all?

Amy: Most of our customers are going through the eggs fast enough that it's not an issue. We follow the Australian Food Standards Requirements for butchers where, as long as the customer is aware when they purchase it because it's in their own packaging we don't have to provide a best-before date on the packaging. We had a little sign up that says today we are refilling your keep carton with eggs that are best-before the 24th of November for example, and I have little cards if people want to take one with that on it. I think the last time someone took a card was probably the second or third week we had them. People know when they buy our eggs they're really fresh so they just make sure they use them.

Daniel: Obviously, the keep cartons they can work in a farmer's market situation when you're dealing one-on-one with customers, in other environments when you're sending off to a retailer that's on-selling it possibly wouldn't work that well. Have you trialled it outside of farmers markets with any other avenue's yet?

Tobias: We have still been trying to get some of our regular butcher customers on board of this. They are still very keen to see how it pans out at the farmer's market and how well they sell before they get on board. We certainly had a few butchers that have said they're interested in it. I'd say it would probably work best in butcher's or in deli's, rather than in small supermarkets, you've got to have someone readily available who can handle the eggs safely. We are hopeful that in the very near future that our regular butcher customers will come on board with it.

Daniel: Yeah, fantastic. Are you seeing now that it's been out there at the farmer's market's for a while now, are you finding that each week you're getting more and more people buying a keep carton because like those first few they saw that; 'Hang on I actually am coming back every few weeks, let's take you up on that offer.'

Tobias: Yeah, we are. We get some customers who turn up and look at us and go, 'Oh, shoot I forgot to bring my keep carton,' and have a panic attack. Once or twice they've driven home to get their keep carton and come back which I think may have mitigated the environmental benefit but that's alright. We do find that a lot of the users who use it, once they've got them become very excited about it and do really like the concept. They are picking up more and more.

Amy: We certainly have more regular customers than we had before who hadn't necessarily been coming to the farmer's market, heard about the keep carton, had already heard about our eggs from someone else, who now come every week or every fortnight to fill their keep cartons. So, not only have we grown our business we are growing the business of the farmer's market as well by encouraging more people to come and shop.

Tobias: We had one woman at North Side Producer's Market in North Sydney that we've done a few times who, when we put it on our social media and the market promoted it, turned up and

said: 'I've never been to this market before, I've just come to get the keep carton. This is a fantastic idea.' She was just so excited about it. I do hope she stayed and bought some goods from other people as well, but I think she mainly came for the keep carton.

Daniel: I think it's exciting from a marketing point of view because once they've got the eggs from you, and you're the only one doing keep cartons, when it's empty they can't get it filled up anywhere else, so I actually like that and you've got your logo on top. They can see in the fridge or on the bench that, 'look it's empty,' and right on top of it they've got your logo, just a great visual reminder that it's time to go get more eggs.

Tobias: Yes, it is.

Amy: Actually that's something that a lot of our customers have loved. They love that they can see how many eggs they have left at a glance, we've had a lot of feedback about that as well - not only are they seeing our logo everytime they look at their eggs, but they're reminded that they need to come back and buy some more.

Daniel: Yeah, excellent. Well, I think that fairly well covers the keep carton. I think it's a great initiative in so many aspects - environmentally, in marketing, in so many ways. I'm very in touch with, I suppose, manufacturing and wastage because my best mate Ruben, he's an industrial designer, so he understands when products are created every product has so much wastage, whether in the manufacturing process, but when that product is finished with, either can it be recycled or is it going to go into landfill. I'm sure my best mate Ruben will be very excited to hear about that, and no doubt he'll probably turn up to one of your markets in Sydney and be purchasing some, he's right in the space of environmental sustainability, especially from an industrial design point of view. Thank you so much for your time, I really appreciate you sharing all about the keep carton. To find out more please see West Walla Farm Facebook page or the website.

Tobias: Thank you for having us Daniel.