

## Transparent marketing on a pasteurised, free-range egg farm with Kerry Dean Podcast Episode 18

### Description for <http://greengrassseggfarming.com>

Daniel O'Brien chats to Kerry Dean from Saddle Mountain Homestead about her pasteurised, free-range egg farm. Kerry discusses how her farm went from a small business with just one flock of chooks to a large farm with around two-and-a-half thousand hens, as well as cows, goats and ducks - in just two years. Plus, the two talk about the importance of transparent marketing when it comes to selling your products.

### Description for [ChickenCaravan.com](http://ChickenCaravan.com)

Daniel O'Brien talks to Kerry Dean from Saddle Mountain Homestead in Queensland. The two discuss the importance of transparent marketing when it comes to selling pasteurized, free-range eggs. Plus, Kerry tells how her farm went from a small business with just one flock, to a large, well-oiled machine with around two-and-a-half thousand chooks, as well as cows, goats and ducks.

### Quotes:

*"We wanted to hit the ground running so we got four-hundred-and-fifty-four hens to start with."* - Kerry Dean

*"When I explain to people the farming that I do, I've never met a person that hasn't been impressed by it."* - Kerry Dean

*"They can see the caravans, they can see that the chooks are well looked after - they've got food, they've got water, there's no smell, there's no noise."* - Kerry Dean

*"It's one central theme to marketing pastured eggs well, just transparency."* -Daniel O'Brien

*"I just offer a good product and I just want people to come here and be comfortable with that."* - Kerry Dean

*"I started with twenty ducks and thought I'd just see how it went and then the demand was quite big."* - Kerry Dean

### Transcript:

**Daniel:** Daniel O'Brien here welcome back to Green Grass Egg Farming. Today, I am talking with Kerry Dean from Saddle Mountain Homestead in Queensland; how are you Kerry?

**Kerry:** I'm good thank you Daniel.

**Daniel:** Excellent. Today, I just want to talk about a bit of a case study from you Kerry of where you're located, where you were at before you had chickens, and then where you are at now - how about you start with a bit about your farm and the location of your farm.

**Kerry:** Okay, so we're located in Townsville, just in the hills behind it, so we're in Harvey's Range. So, about 400 metres above sea level, so it's much cooler and fresher up here. We've been operating for nearly two years and it's definitely had its challenges, but definitely a positive move. Prior to doing chicken farming, I was a stay-at-home mum, so this is a massive change for me, but loving it.

**Daniel:** So what made you decide to go into chickens? What was your research process of going, 'Hey, I don't have chickens but I wanna have a chicken farm,.' What was that process for you?

**Kerry:** Well, it was a bit of an unusual one, my dad wanted to run some chickens with his cattle and things like that so I started doing the research for him regarding that, and then I started to think about; 'I can do this myself.' I needed to get back into the workforce, looking for a great lifestyle change, so I moved up on to acreage. Chickens are a smaller animal, so it's easier for me to manage. I was a single mum at the time, so it was easy for me to manage eggs. I probably thought it was a lot simpler than it what it actually turned out to be. It was just a manageable thing I could do on my own.

**Daniel:** Tell me about when you first started. How many chickens did you start with? That was about two years ago, did you say?

**Kerry:** Yeah, December 15th two years ago, so nearly coming up to two years now. We started off with, we got one of the chicken caravans, I did my research into the different caravans and found what one was going to be the best one to suit me. Then, we wanted to hit the ground running so we got four-hundred-and-fifty-four hens to start with, with one of the larger caravans. We just worked with that, I did my things manually, and got the caravan there. I was using temporary fencing at the time, since then I've moved to permanent fencing and just rotating the paddocks more. Started off with four-fifty and that was a good number because it sort of threw us in the deep end a little bit, but manageable.

**Daniel:** Tell me about the marketing, so you've got your four-hundred-and-fifty hens, they start coming on the lay, how did you go about marketing those first lot of eggs?

**Kerry:** Well, the funny thing was when I first started the farm the biggest thing I was worried about was keeping the chickens alive. I was so worried about the chickens and all of that, I never really took into account the marketing side of it. Luckily for me, I have a background in being a personal assistant, so admin, secretarial, that sort of thing comes natural to me. So, I hired a marketing lady and we started working towards what the brand was that I wanted, and once I had the brand, it was difficult to sell the eggs before the chooks had laid the eggs and

then obviously once they started laying they didn't stop, so I just contacted restaurants, I had to tee up meetings with people, I just had to get people listening to my story to just get a little bit of support. Once I had that little bit of support from a couple of high-end restaurants in Townsville, and a couple of the organic stores, people started to know the brand and it just sort of grew from there.

**Daniel:** Okay, so where you're at in Townsville, I can think of other little pockets in Australia like Byron Bay and there's areas outside of Melbourne that they're really food hubs and there is already sort of established egg farms, so if you said 'Hey we've got free-range chickens on grass in movable sheds', a lot of people would've heard about them. Approaching these places in Townsville, is this something that they had heard about or were quite open to or was this a new idea for them?

**Kerry:** I'd say it was a bit more of a new idea. I think it was definitely well received, given it wasn't planned, but my farm kicked off at the same time of the whole 'pastured free-range is the new free-range' stuff was in the news. People were really interested. I constantly get people asking, 'Can we just come and have a look at your farm?' The restaurants, I had to basically educate them, in what the difference between pastured free-range and free-range. When I explain to people the farming that I do, I've never met a person that hasn't been impressed by it. Daniel: Yeah, it's just so different to what we do see in the news of sort of tricky words on egg cartons to make them sound better than they are. So, for a lot of people it is that breath of fresh air, when they go; 'Oh, this is actually a genuine farm?'

**Kerry:** Yeah, and I've got a bit of a transparency at my farm. As long as I'm here, I'm happy on the weekends to come up and obviously security is enforced, but I can take them down and they can actually see the chickens running around. They can see the caravans, they can see that the chooks are well looked after - they've got food, they've got water, there's no smell, there's no noise. So, they're quite happy, I think, then when they see the chickens out there, their morals, they're doing the right thing, in their own eyes and they're a bit happier to eat the eggs, given that fact.

**Daniel:** What sort of people are coming out, are they some of the restaurant owners or end consumers?

**Kerry:** Probably more end consumers, luckily with where I'm located there's the heritage tealands, which is a very old building - rouch, thick and beautiful. And they have hundreds of people that come up to the tea rooms on the weekends, especially on the weekends, and then some of those people come to the farm and just have a look, just to see. I have a sign on the highway there that says we're open and you know, they are just people looking for something to do on a Sunday. People don't know where their food comes from anymore, so to actually come here and be able to see the chickens running around and to speak to the owner of the business, you can ask me any question and I'll tell you what we do, I think that's why people are quite

happy. I've had restaurant people come up here, and they're obviously quite impressed to because they can have a bit of faith in where their food is coming from as well.

**Daniel:** Fantastic. It's one central theme to marketing pastured eggs well, just transparency. Whether it's Instagram, Facebook, website, in person, field days, open days, just to have that transparency because it, I speak about it all the time, it's just the opposite of the food industry and people like that; they go, 'Right, you're actually not trying to hide anything.' I think that it's great that you've got a sign on the highway to send people in. Of those people that would see the sign, how many of those would not know you existed and versus they buy eggs off you and go 'I've been meaning to come and check this out some time.'

**Kerry:** Probably 50/50. I do have some people that come up and buy them from the farm gate. Just because, again, it's a thing to do on a Sunday. They drive up, they have a chat and have a look, really. Then I've got the other people who say, 'We just drove past your sign, we've never heard of you before.' So, that just shows me I've still got a long way to go with marketing, just to tell people that I am here. I don't want to take over the world with my eggs, but I just offer a good product and I just want people to come here and be comfortable with that.

**Daniel:** So, two years ago you started with four-fifty hens, where did you go after that? When was the next increase in your flock after those initial four-fifty hens?

**Kerry:** That was about four months later. I wanted to keep the rotation of the flock, so I could have five thousand hens on my property, so I just wanted to keep the rotation for the size difference as the eggs increased in size. But, I had another flock coming up along behind. So basically every three to four months we get another four hundred and fifty.

**Daniel:** Have you got at the moment a three or four different age groups, like three or four different flocks with different age groups, is that right?

**Kerry:** Yes, that's right. So, they've got different coloured leg tags on their leg so I can tell who belongs with who. We are lucky enough that we don't have to cull any of our hens, we manage to on-sell them all so we sell those guys off and then the new chooks arrive - that's how it works.

**Daniel:** Tell me the process of selling off those old birds so you don't have to cull.

**Kerry:** Well, it's pretty easy actually, I put an add on Facebook, I'm not into Instagram just yet. So, I just put an ad up on Facebook and Gumtree and I get heaps and heaps of people. It's nothing for us to sell two hundred hens on a Saturday morning. I just tell people to write their name down, how many they want, the night before we've created the small pen up the front because obviously I don't want too many people coming on to the farm at once. We create a small pen at the front, we go and collect the hens the night before, while they're asleep, and then bring them up to the front pen. In the morning they've got their food and water and people just start rocking up and pop them into the boxes and off they go.

**Daniel:** Sounds like you've got a good system there. Obviously you're location, there are enough people who are wanting hens for their backyard, I take it.

**Kerry:** Yeah, definitely. In any given week I'd have two or three people messaging me, 'Have you got any hens available?' I don't do it obviously all that often but I try and sell, and then a week or two later sell some more. It just depends on my demand as well. The demand is starting to drop off a little bit at the moment due to the tourism season over, it's starting to get a bit hot up here at the moment, so tourists aren't coming up as much. So, the restaurants are getting a little bit quieter, and just the general foot traffic is a lot quieter through Townsville.

**Daniel:** You mentioned before, you've got different flocks of different ages; so you started off with the temporary fence, tell me your experience with a temporary fence and why you've now moved to permanent fences, because they've both got pros and cons; I'd love to hear your journey of why you've transitioned.

**Kerry:** Yeah, we had the electric fence netting that you push into the ground. Up here, it can obviously get very, very dry. When it rains, it really rains. I was finding that it was getting really difficult for me to get the netting into the ground and when I'm supposed to move it every couple of days; putting a new fence in around, etc. it was just, it was a lot of work. The nets were, they're not heavy, but when you're doing 4x fifty metres of them they do get a bit heavy, so we just decided to put permanent fencing in throughout the property. I think we've got, probably about fifteen/sixteen paddocks up here now. It's just easier for us to open the gate, go through. They're large paddocks and some of them now we've got some ducks as well, ducks are now in with the new orchards that we've planted. With the other ones it's just easier, it's higher fencing with a barb on the top, we maybe get the occasional chook that gets out of it but it's a dingo proof fence because a part of it is also my perimeter fence, but it stops any predators as well.

**Daniel:** That obviously makes sense, you've planned out your paddocks, you've put your fence in, being dingo proof and cutting on labour..The thing with permanent fencing versus movable, it's different for every farm. Like, if some farms got big wide open spaces, flood plains where they've also got cattle and sheep and other things running, sometimes you may not want to put chicken netting over all of it, but if you're more set up to having the chickens and you know where they want to be, definitely permanent fencing. In your case, it's definitely saving you quite a bit of time each week in moving fences.

**Kerry:** Yeah, and what we can also do, because we rest paddocks, so these chicks will be in this paddock for a month or so and then they will move across to their other paddock, what we can also do is just leave the gates open and we can let the cows and the goats roam around down there because within those paddocks they form a bigger, one large paddock, off the house yard. So, we can lock them in there so the animals can still roam around in there, and the chooks are in their paddocks and the cows can then go in and out of all the others and do what

they do. It works really, really well for us so I think I would be exhausted if I would have to keep doing the other fences.

**Daniel:** So tell me a little bit more about the cattle and the goats and how they work. Do you try and follow the cattle with the chickens or do they work independently?

**Kerry:** At the moment they are sort of independently, we've just had some rain so it's beautiful and green and I've actually just had to start mowing again. We have been short on feed up here, so we actually had the cows out in quite a large paddock. We don't really put the two together, but it's just because it's something we've never done. I've only got ten cows, so they're in a different paddock at the moment and then we really want to get them out into the bigger paddock we can leave them and they can just roam out there. Once the grass gets longer in here, we've got eight goats at the moment, which just roam around - not in with the chickens. They just help keep the laneways and just along the fence lines, all down as well.

**Daniel:** So you've got cows, goats and chickens all there.

**Kerry:** And ducks, yeah.

**Daniel:** And ducks. How many ducks have you got there?

**Kerry:** Fifty ducks.

**Daniel:** Are they for meat or egg production?

**Kerry:** They're for egg production.

**Daniel:** Okay, so how do they work - the ducks?

**Kerry:** Well, the ducks are kept separate from the chickens at all times, but they live in where we've planted an orchard. We've planted like a hundred fruit trees. So, they live in pens of twenty each, and then we just pen them up at night so when they lay their eggs, they lay them in the pen and in the morning we let them out and get the eggs out. So, just every afternoon the kids and I pop them away and then in the morning, let them out and collect the eggs.

**Daniel:** What are the customers responses to the duck eggs? Why are people purchasing duck eggs, are they purchasing them for cooking?

**Kerry:** Yeah, I do have a fairly big asian following at the moment with the pickled eggs. So, there is a lot of that going on at the moment. But also a lot of people just for baking. The people are super excited to see them, but I can't imagine you'd possibly eat them. Basically, it's just like a giant chicken egg.

**Daniel:** Yeah, I found it interesting, a few years ago I had a few ducks and eating the eggs after being used to chicken eggs I just couldn't get used to them, but I'm not one for really getting into baking but people just rave about how good they are for scones, or muffins, or I forget, I'm not a baker. They said they just work so much better to hold your cake together.

**Kerry:** Yes, and they help it rise. I'm not a baker either, I don't really have much spare time on my hands for that but yeah people are definitely keen for them. That was just another thing since I was doing eggs, chicken eggs is predominantly the farm, 90% of it, and then the duck eggs is just a little added bonus.

**Daniel:** With the ducks, did people ask you for the eggs and then you started or started and then offered them?

**Kerry:** I was actually given five ducks. A lady for an article in one of the newspapers about me, she for some reason, some medical reasons, couldn't have her ducks anymore; she was unwell. She asked, would I like them and I said I've never owned a duck before, sure. So, I popped them in the paddock and there was a drake in there as well, so we had some little ducklings and that was quite cute. Then, I just thought you can't buy duck eggs in Townsville, backyard people sell a lot of them but there is nowhere that are credited. So, I started with twenty ducks and thought I'd just see how it went and then the demand was quite big. I've got an order for tomorrow of twenty half-dozen, and the guy just rang me and asked, 'Can I get another twenty-half dozen?' So he wants forty-half tomorrow. They can be quite popular, especially in the different communities of people.

**Daniel:** Back to your chickens, how many chickens are you running up there on your farm?

**Kerry:** About two-and-a-half thousand. We've got five caravans at the moment, one of those caravans I do need to have sale, they are probably the older girls now, so just to sale those girls. Something will happen before Christmas and then my next lot of chooks will come in December. Actually Christmas Eve or something I think it is.

**Daniel:** Tell me, what do you see, going forward a few years are you going to increase the chickens, the cattle, the ducks, the goats; what's the next chapter for Saddle Mountain Homestead?

**Kerry:** Look, I'm probably stupid enough to increase all of them. We've just bought a bull. We have the lowline cattle here, and they're beautiful. So, we definitely want to push forward with some more cows. The goats we're sort of just keeping as lawnmowers at the moment, we're not sure what we'll do with those. Chickens, if the demands is there, I'll definitely go with more chickens and the ducks, if there is a demand, it's something we can do. We know what we're doing, so to increase the numbers it's just a little bit of extra labour. We're fully set up for everything now, just trying to push the farm gate sales, getting people to come up. I mean, I live in one of the most beautiful places in the world, I just absolutely love it up here. It's nice and

cool, we're surrounded by mountain ranges, I'm four-hundred metres above sea level, it's just a top spot to call home. Basically, just keep going with whatever the demand is.

**Daniel:** Excellent, fantastic. Well, you've got a lot on your plate there, a lot of animals to take care of and I think you really have grown it fast to look back, two years not having chickens to where you are now with two-and-a-half thousand chickens, and ducks, and cows, and goats, so I think you've just done a fantastic job. It's great that the people of Townsville can get quality pastured eggs and also visit the farm, to have that level of transparency. I really appreciate you jumping on the call today, and if people want to find out more about your farm, what is the best website or Facebook page they should go check out?

**Kerry:** It's pretty much Facebook, Saddle Mountain Homestead Free-Range Eggs. It's updated very regularly, I'm always up there posting a photo or something about what's going on at the farm, there's always something happening up here, so that's probably the best way, through Facebook.

**Daniel:** Excellent. I'd encourage anyway, if you're up in Townsville, go for a drive up the hill and check it out.

**Kerry:** Absolutely, absolutely.

**Daniel:** Thanks for your time today Kerry.

**Kerry:** Thank you Daniel, I appreciate it.