

# PRODUCER PROFILE

By John Fitzsimmons



## Egg production a family affair

Family farms have been the foundation of Australian agriculture for a long time and the Postregna family's Tamarix egg production enterprise on Melbourne's sprawling south east fringe reflects a typical history. It started "closer in" and moved out in response to the expanding metropolis, adapting to changing circumstances but staying focused on the core business.



Lisa and Andrew Postregna now manage Tamarix Poultry Farm at Dandenong South, Victoria. Their commitment to the egg industry is demonstrated by their investments in upgraded equipment, facilities and capacity.

Like many others post-World War 2, Agostino 'Gus' Postregna immigrated to Australia from north east Italy, near the Slovenian border, to make a new life in Australia. He worked at many hard and menial jobs saving enough to bring some of his family (father, mother and two brothers) to Australia in the early 1960s. Once they arrived he leased a property in Keysborough, producing both chickens and eggs and this was the beginning of a partnership (Postregna Bros.) with extended family including Gus's brothers Julian and Damian. They purchased more land, and moved solely into egg production in the same area. Then, in the late 1960s, Gus went to Italy where he met his wife Alma and raised a family upon returning to Australia.

In the early 1970s the family members followed separate paths – although all remained connected to the poultry industry. As Melbourne continued its expansion, Gus, Alma and their family expanded further out to a new farm at

fast-growing South Dandenong. This remains the home of Tamarix Poultry Farm Pty Ltd although the business has now expanded even further in the region. They currently have about 70,000 cage layers and 16,000 birds in barn-style accommodation at South Dandenong.

Today Tamarix Poultry Farm is operated by Gus and Alma's son Andrew Postregna and his wife Lisa, who met as Business Studies students at university. Andrew's sisters Giuliana, Teresa and Ivana also continue in the industry although not at Tamarix Poultry Farm.

In 2006, with the sheds more than 20 years old and with Gus not getting any younger, Tamarix faced a major decision of whether to continue with egg production or not. The outcome, fortunately was 'yes' and the commitment to the future was underpinned by Andrew and Lisa's significant investment in new sheds, feed systems, and grading and packing equipment. There's even a smart Egg Farm Eatery fronting



the secure production facilities, drawing a high volume of passing outer suburban commuters in to buy eggs and poultry products, or have breakfast or lunch.

Tamarix Poultry Farm remains staunchly independent, growing its own replacement birds (about 85,000 per year) and, utilising nutritional consultants, formulating and mixing its own feed on-site. Andrew and Lisa purchased a former broiler site in nearby Cranbourne West with capacity to rear up to 25,000 replacements, and more recently took over another farm at Langwarrin South which produces another 50,000 birds under contract to Hy-Line Australia.

Andrew and Lisa are assisted by 19 staff, including four delivery drivers.

Sales are focused on independent retailers, delis, cafes, bakeries and manufacturing foodservice, with a strong marketing accent on egg freshness and quality, and customer service



Tamarix' Egg Farm Eatery sells farm fresh eggs, poultry products and other selected gourmet food lines while also offering light meals and great coffee.

continued next page 

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As a family-operated egg producer, Andrew Postregna is occupied by the industry's big issues including flock health and biosecurity – AI – and preserving consumer choice in the fresh egg market, as well as the usual challenges for small businesses everywhere.

"Everything is getting harder - there are always more rules and regulations, biosecurity and disease issues and, especially over the last 10–15 years, animal activism," Andrew commented.

Avian influenza is always a risk but we're seeing some of the 'old' diseases we thought had gone, like spotty liver, coming back, he explained. Infectious laryngotracheitis (ILT) is another one which, while it can be vaccinated against, appeared to mutate to a new strain which spreads easily through dust and feathers.

The Dandenong area naturally has a number of water courses, drainage lines and swamps, an environment further compounded by the modern trend to incorporating ornamental lakes in both industrial and residential developments. This provides additional habitat for water birds but, Andrew suggests, it also increases the risk of disease crossover into poultry flocks – especially free range birds. This is one of the reasons he still supports the cage system – lower disease risks and mortality.

He says there is a high demand for eggs and concedes that cage eggs have lost some market share in that direction. He thinks the



Significant investment in up to date plant and equipment ensures Tamarix is future oriented.

free range movement is still growing and expects demand will continue, serviced by more smaller free range enterprises. However he believes the public gets a biased picture of the different production systems. Andrew believes his birds enjoy a lower disease rate, and lower stress levels with less bullying.

"There will always be a pecking order but in small groups birds get attached to each other, and sort themselves out – you can see it," he observed.

He has seen some activist programs affect the egg industry and has been affected by personally targeted comments; he admits he was "pretty upset" especially as he does not

support any "cruel" practices. Andrew has not practiced beak trimming for at least 15 years and believes new birds coming into the sheds are a lot calmer than previously.

Operating on the fringe of a metropolis there will also always be the issue of living with neighbours. Tamarix mostly shares the landscape with light industrial factories and warehouses, however there is also a significant retirement village with about 700 residents close by. Andrew observes that, these days, local government doesn't seem to want poultry farms and management of the retirement village expressed some concerns as the flock was expanded. However Andrew says there are no issues with the village's residents, many of who have become customers and regulars at the Egg Farm Eatery. This is aided by a highly effective manure drying system, specially designed 'chimney stacks' to exhaust air from the sheds, and the regular removal of manure – up to 80 cubic metres weekly being delivered to nurseries and other horticultural enterprises. This, together with effective screening of the sheds, also eliminates any fly problems.

Like the egg industry itself, in 2015 Tamarix Poultry Farm has moved on significantly from the enterprise built by hard working immigrants. It is now a second generation business with a future-oriented plan and a diversified operating platform. Nevertheless it is still a 'family farm' committed to the egg industry and supplying quality food to its many customers.



An Egg Farm Eatery just have to have a rustic décor chook.