

HICKMAN'S family farms

is Favorably Impacted by Legislation... with a Little Help from AFMA

By Lisa Schnebly Heidinger

Clint Hickman of Hickman's Family Farms understands things work best when people work together.

Normally, he works with two brothers and his sister in the day-to-day operations, often having breakfast with his parents before getting started. But when some troubling presentations about free-range versus caged eggs came up, Hickman found his ally in the Arizona Food Marketing Alliance.

First, a bit of background: Clint Hickman loves the way his family does business. He is proud of the three-generation operation, particularly of the farms in Colorado, Maricopa and Buckeye, where more than four million hens are laying eggs – eggs, says Hickman, that can be in customers' hands within 48 hours.

So he was more than mildly concerned to hear that the Humane Society of the United States ("As opposed to the Arizona Humane Society, which does great work – the Human Society of the United States is a vegan lobbying group," he says) produced a stinging release on caged hens, including disturbing photographs.

"I don't tell anyone what to like," he says. "And some people love cage-free eggs. We produce and sell cage-free eggs. But what they were putting out was wrong. And AFMA – I don't think AFMA toots its own horn enough. What they did was amazing."

What AFMA did was host a gathering of all parties potentially involved in, and affected by,



potential legislation regulating caged hens in animal agriculture businesses, from the farmer to the grocer, and including the Department of Agriculture, as well as elected officials. "And," Hickman adds, "we had a couple of lawyers there, to make sure we stayed on track. That's the kind of thing AFMA's great at – otherwise we might have had to do the proposal to each party involved, one at a time. Also, it was important, since this concerned governmental action, to maintain complete transparency. Meeting at AFMA headquarters provided that."

Hickman says it was good to see competitors come together, farmers and grocers, to discuss the problems with the HSUS release – and share an egg-based meal produced by his mother and sister ("They make the most amazing egg dishes!")

"Debbie Roth got everyone together," says Hickman. "AFMA took a very helpful position, and served a vital purpose for the food industry, reaching out to the public involved on

a piece of law. And everyone stayed involved, because there's always a risk of the bill being amended, as it works its way through the legislative process."

He also offered a tour of Hickman's Family Farms facilities, illustrating why he personally prefers caged eggs to cage-free. The result was SB1373, sponsored by Senator Robert "Bob" Burns (R-dist. 9) and Representative Jerry Weiers (R-dist. 12) that maintains the Arizona government has charge of poultry practices, "and is not subject to further regulation by a county, city, town or other political subdivision of this state."

Now Hickman can focus on other aspects of the business he enjoys more. Those include serving on the American Egg Board and recently delivering three truckloads of eggs to various food banks near Hickman's egg farms. One little-known aspect of egg production is calling the rabbi to bless the flame in case the special pilot light goes out. That's part of Hickman's Family Farms kosher status.

"Right now, only two percent of the population of the United States is involved in food production for the other 98 percent," says Hickman. "It's very hard work, and most family farmers have opted out. We need help like we got from AFMA, so that people can control their food sources, and not rely on producers outside the United States. I can't thank them enough."



Hens doing what comes natural



Clint Hickman and his Mom host lunch at AFMA



Hickman's Family Farms Operation