



EGG-TOPIA



Many producers claim to be ethical. But Eddie's Eggs takes things to a whole new level. They have raised some of the country's happiest chickens on certified organic pasture, producing non-GMO eggs.

Text: Will Edgcumbe
Images © Daniel Colpo

Picture this: You wake up in the morning to the excited chatter of your friends as your hotel room door opens out onto a lush orchard. You hop out, stretch your legs and find a veritable feast of all your favourite food before you – and there's plenty to go around. You amble around as you please, taking in a bit of shade when the day gets

hot. And after a pleasant, fulfilling day in nature, you go safely to sleep knowing that tomorrow will be just as satisfying.

This is not the description of a fancy wellness retreat. You may be surprised to find out that that twinge of jealousy you might feel is for the life of a few thousand hens. Cue existential crisis.

Set in the heart of the Sundays River Valley in the Eastern Cape, Eddie Ferreira's operation is something to behold. Each "eggmobile" is set in a fenced off 1,500 m² section of orchard. This means that each bird has an average of 5 m² of space to do their thing. Each eggmobile moves to a new pasture weekly, so the



hens don't overgraze, and they can rotate through the entire citrus orchard, turning the soil and fertilising it naturally.

HAPPY HENS

Eddie describes their days vividly: "At sunrise the eggmobiles' doors are opened and hundreds of eager hens fly off their perches and head into the orchard to eat whatever bugs, plants and herbs they can find. Their grain ration and water drinkers are placed out in the field to enable them to enjoy additional feed and water should they require it.

"The grain ration consists of non-GMO and organic grains, organic lucerne, calcium and a vitamin and mineral supplement. Between sunrise and about 11h00 they will hop back into the eggmobiles to find a private spot behind a curtain in one of the many nest boxes built into the eggmobiles. Here, each will lay an egg and then proudly announce to the world with a loud cackle





First Page: If you happen to be a chicken, you couldn't land with your bum in the proverbial butter any more than by living on Eddie Ferreira's farm and spending your days pecking around an orchard.

This Page Top: Each evening, the chickens return to their "egmobile" homes which provide a safe and warm place to roost and lay their eggs.

This Page Bottom: Eddie Ferreira gave up a life of chasing material wealth, for a quieter, more fulfilling one on his farm in the Sundays River Valley

Last Page: Eddie's Eggs are ethically produced, GMO-free, and absolutely delicious!



that a beautiful egg has been produced.

"They will then head back into the orchard and here they will strut around scratching, pecking, dust-bathing or even having the odd brief fight with one of the other ladies. At sundown they all make their way back to the comfort and safety of the egmobile to find their roosting spot on one of the inbuilt roosts. The doors are then closed and locked for them to enjoy a good night's rest until sunrise the following morning."

But not all hens are as fortunate as those belonging to Eddie. This is a man who, amongst all the greenwashing of phrases like "free range" and "sustainable", is the real deal, and the proof is in the eggs his happy hens produce. But it was a journey to get to this point.

IN SEARCH OF A SIMPLER LIFE

"I grew up on a dairy farm as a young boy, and after spending some time on my



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father's farm after school I decided to head off to Mpumalanga and Mozambique in search of fortune and greener pastures," Eddie says.

"After finding fortune, and living a life of chasing material wealth, the pressures of a huge business eventually became too much for me to handle. I subsequently lost my business, my wife and children, and decided to head back home to the Eastern Cape to find a simpler life with old friends and family."

Sadly, Eddie's sister passed away suddenly from cancer, and Eddie fell into despair – until his brother Johnny, one of four members of the Sundays Organic Growers Association (SOGA) group of certified organic citrus farms, encouraged Eddie to start a non-GMO egg operation on his farm. (The SOGA Growers started their own processing facility in Kirkwood where they produce and package the only certified organic citrus juice products for the local retail market.)

"We set up a company and I immediately started doing intensive research on pasture-raised eggs in eggmobiles in June 2017," Eddie says. "By August my first batch of 600 hens arrived with two brand new eggmobiles. I currently have 2,400 hens in eight eggmobiles producing around 2,200 eggs per day. I plan to have 4,800 birds by July 2018, should the market allow."

HEALTHY SOIL = HEALTHY EGGS = HEALTHY PEOPLE

Here's hoping the market does allow it, because the benefits of operating the way Eddie and the SOGA farmers do means that, from an ecological sustainability point of view, the land and people benefit, rather than purely being a means of extraction like much of South Africa's agriculture.

In a sense, it all boils down to soil health. "In a certified organic orchard, soil life and activity is promoted through the use of natural ground rock, manures, compost and organic material, instead of life-destroying salt fertilisers. No synthetic chemicals are allowed in controlling pests and diseases. This environment is conducive to a healthy, well-mineralised soil," Eddie explains.

"Such soils contain a vast array of life forms which we refer to as the 'soil food



web'. These life forms make nutrients available to plants and are fed sugars and other exudates in turn by the plants. The soil is the origin of health or disease. These healthy soils produce healthy grasses and plants, which in turn produce insects and bugs. These healthy food sources produce an uncontaminated source of nutrition for the hens in addition to their GMO-free grain ration."

Those eggs are then enjoyed by people who can know that not only are these eggs

ethically produced from an animal welfare perspective, but that they are the culmination of a healthy food chain. We are what we eat – but we're also what our food eats. Eddie's fight is, in some respects, a lonely one, but here's hoping he'll enjoy more and more company over time as farmers around the country adopt similar methods.

Find out more about Eddie's Eggs and where to purchase them at www.farmereddie.co.za or send an email to info@farmereddie.co.za.

