



BRITISH LION EGGS - A MARKETING CASE STUDY

THE PROBLEM

In 1988, with the market already in long-term decline, the British egg industry was forced to face the most challenging issue in its history. On 3 December, during an impromptu interview for ITN, Edwina Currie, then Junior Health Minister, stated that: "Most of the egg production in this country, sadly, is now infected with salmonella." Salmonella is a bacterium that causes sickness and diarrhoea in humans and, in extreme cases involving infants or the elderly, can even be fatal.

Although a new type of salmonella had emerged and caught the industry unprepared, Ms Currie's remark was blown out of all proportion in the media, leading the BEIC to call for the statement to be withdrawn. The biggest food scare British agriculture had ever seen threatened to ruin the industry for good. A media frenzy produced story after story blaming eggs for a spate of food poisoning outbreaks across the country.

Panic took hold amongst British consumers and sales of eggs dropped by 60 per cent virtually overnight, leaving the industry devastated. Despite the drop in sales, hens continued

to produce eggs creating a logistical problem as the surplus had to be disposed of somewhere. The damage of the food scare was lasting as the eggs industry could not afford to promote eggs effectively. Over the next ten years, egg sales continued to fall by approximately 8 per cent year-on-year, leaving the industry in dire straits. With negative media coverage continuing until the mid 1990s, drastic action was required.

