

Egg Production

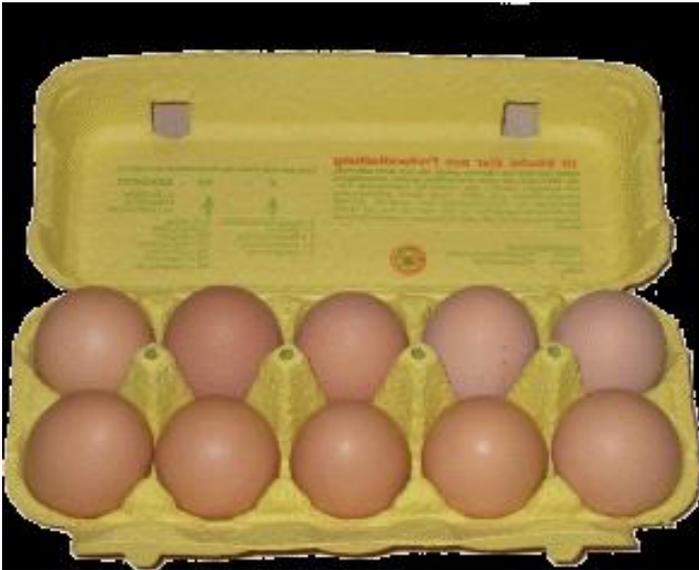
About Chickens



Scientists have discovered that chickens have memory and emotions, and a keenly developed consciousness of one another and of their surroundings. Researchers are publishing findings on chicken intelligence that have challenged old notions about avian cognitive abilities. For instance, chickens clearly understand cause-and-effect relationships, an advanced comprehension skill that puts their intellect

beyond that of dogs. In the book *The Development of Brain and Behavior in the Chicken*, Dr. Lesley Rogers, a professor of neuroscience and animal behavior, concludes, “It is now clear that birds have cognitive capacities equivalent to those of mammals, even primates.”

Egg Factories



Egg factory farms typically consist of a series of warehouse-like sheds, some the length of football fields, that can house 200,000 or more birds in each windowless building. Inside, hens are crammed into thousands of barren wire cages, known as battery cages, stacked several tiers high and extending in rows down the length of the building. Multiple birds are crammed into each small cage, allowing each hen

about 67 square inches of space, less area than a sheet of paper.



The cages, stacked one on top of another, force the chickens in lower rows to live in the excrement of those above them. The excessive manure causes ammonia burn to the chicken's eyes and sometimes leads to blindness. Manure fumes and rotting carcasses are so severe that poultry workers are forced to wear gas masks.

Battery Cages

Perhaps the most abused of all farm animals, nearly 280 million laying hens in the United States are confined in barren wire battery cages so restrictive the birds can't even spread their wings.



Battery cages are designed with a sloping wire floor so the eggs will roll down and onto a tray for easy collection. The cage floor slopes toward the food and water troughs, and weaker hens are often unable to reach the food and starve to death or are crushed to the bottom. In the words of industry journal *Poultry Tribune*: "We have discovered chickens literally grown fast to the cage. The flesh of the toes grew completely around the wire".

Factory Farmed Hens

Approximately 20 percent of the hens raised in battery cages die of stress or disease. These birds do not have enough space to spread their wings and consequently suffer atrophy of the wings from disuse. After months of confinement, their necks are likely to

be covered with blisters, wings bare from feather loss, combs bloody, and feet torn.



Today's hens are bred to lay 250 eggs a year almost twice the number of eggs per year than hens did in 1940. Because egg-laying depletes calcium levels, these overworked birds are highly susceptible to osteoporosis, 89 percent of them have the disease, making them vulnerable to broken bones, weak joints, paralysis and death. Their bodies lose more calcium to form egg shells than they can assimilate from their diets. *Feedstuffs*, an industry journal, explains, "...the laying hen at peak eggshell cannot absorb enough calcium from her diet..." while another (*Lancaster Farming*) states, "... a hen will use a quantity of calcium for yearly egg production that is greater than her entire skeleton by 30-fold or more."

Factory farmed layer hens have been genetically manipulated to lay excessively large eggs, and consequently their uteruses sometimes prolapsed (become expelled along with the egg) They also suffer from what the industry calls 'cage layer fatigue,' and many become 'egg bound' and die when their bodies are too weak to pass another egg.

Beak Trimming (or Debeaking)

The overcrowding in battery cages leads to fighting between birds and self-mutilation due to stress. To reduce fighting injuries caused by stress-induced aggression, the tips of the birds' beaks are sliced off using hot blades, and without anesthesia.



The hot blade cuts through the complex horn, bone, and sensitive tissue causing severe pain. The beak of a chicken has an extensive nerve supply, and this procedure, which requires cutting through tender

tissue similar to the flesh under human fingernails, is so painful that many chicks die of shock. Some die of starvation, when eating becomes too painful. Poultry researcher, Dr. Ian Duncan notes, “there is now good morphological, neurophysiological, and behavioral evidence that beak trimming leads to both acute and chronic pain.”

What Happens to Male Chicks?

Male chicks of egg-laying breeds are a byproduct of the egg industry and of no economic value since roosters don't lay eggs. Egg-laying chicken breeds have been genetically selected exclusively for maximum egg production, and therefore, don't grow fast or large enough to be raised profitably for meat. They aren't bred to grow very quickly and produce a lot of muscle.



At hatcheries, males and female chicks are separated on conveyor belt on the day they hatch. About 250

million male chicks per year (approximately 650,000 per hour) are disposed of by being shoved into trash bin and left to suffocate under the weight of each other or ground up alive in macerators. One research scientist observed that even after twenty seconds in the grinder, there were only partly damaged animals with whole skulls.

Forced-molting

When the birds are about 15 months old, they are “force-molted” - kept in low lighting and fed a low-calorie diet for seven to eighteen days, which stresses their systems and shocks them into another egg-laying cycle.

5% - 10% of birds die during the molt, and those who live may lose more than 25% of their body weight.

Slaughter of egg-laying hens

Chickens comprise 95% of all land animals slaughtered for each year.

After one year of egg production, hens are considered spent and they are sent to slaughter. They usually typically end up in soups, pot pies, or similar low-grade chicken meat products where their bodies can be shredded to hide the bruises from consumers.

Over 200 million female chickens are slaughtered each year in the egg industry. Sadly, these animals are excluded from the Animal Welfare Act and the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act; there are no laws that govern the treatment of chickens while on farms, while being transported, or while being slaughtered.

At the slaughterhouse, the birds are hung upside down in shackles, stunned in a electrified hot water bath, and their necks are slit by a circular blade. Many birds bleed to death while fully conscious., The birds are then submerged in a scalding tank to remove their feathers.



Free range, Cage-free, and Organic Eggs

Free range: There are no USDA standards or third-party auditing in "free range" egg production. The size and quality of the outdoor area and the amount of time the birds are allowed outside is not regulated, so some "free-range" eggs may actually be produced by hens confined to a shed with an opening leading to a small yard, for a restricted amount of time each day. There are no rules pertaining to what the birds can be fed. Forced molting through starvation and de-beaking are permitted.

Cage-free: The label "cage free" does not indicate that any standards or audits are in place. Hens are generally un-caged inside barns or warehouses, but do not have access to the outdoors. Forced molting through starvation and de-beaking are permitted. There is no third-party auditing of these operations.

Certified Organic: The birds are un-caged inside barns or warehouses, and are required to have outdoor access (although there have been concerns about lax enforcement, with some large-scale producers not providing birds meaningful access to the outdoors). They are fed an organic, all-vegetarian diet free of antibiotics and pesticides, as required by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program. Forced molting through starvation and de-beaking are permitted. Compliance is verified through third-party auditing.

The hens in the three categories listed above, like conventional egg-layers, are slaughtered after about one to two years, when their productivity declines. These hens are killed in the same manner as battery-caged "spent" laying hens.