



Caring for laying hens

Farmers, like any animal owners, want to provide the best care possible for their animals. Canadian farmers have helped to develop "Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals," in co-operation with animal scientists, government and many other partners. The codes spell out what's appropriate in the daily care processes that occur on the farm, from basic needs such as shelter, housing, feed and water to operational procedures like breeding and transportation.

In addition to the Code, egg farmers also follow national animal care and food safety programs.

Egg farmers work hard caring for their hens every day of the year, while supplying consumers with safe and nutritious eggs. They work with hens because they enjoy them and want only the best for their birds. Humane treatment of hens is a priority - and the law. Farmers make sure hens have adequate light and air, a well-balanced, nutritious diet, fresh water and clean surroundings.

Breeds

Chickens raised for egg production are of different breeds than those raised for meat.

There are two main breeds of laying hens in Canada - White Leghorn and Rhode Island Red.

White Leghorns are the most common type of laying hens in Canada. There are many breeds of White Leghorns including Shaver, Lohman and Babcock breeds. They have white feathers and lay white eggs.

Rhode Island Red is an old pure-line breed of hens. Many breeders have used genes from the Rhode Island Red to breed the brown-feathered hens that are common today. They have brown feathers and lay brown eggs.

Off to market

Eggs are collected and stored in a cooler on the farm until they are picked up - usually once or twice a week - by a refrigerated truck. The truck then takes them to a licensed grading station.

Once at the grading station, eggs are washed and sanitized by a high-speed washer that gently scrubs the eggs. They are then examined for quality through a process called candling. A trained operator scans the eggs as they pass over a strong beam of light, which shows the contents of the egg and the quality of the egg shell.

The eggs are then divided into grades A, B, or C. Grade A eggs are the ones sold in grocery stores. They have round, well-centered yolks, and clean uncracked shells. Eggs are then weighed and separated into peewee, small, medium, large, jumbo or double yolk sizes.

Once eggs have been graded, they will be delivered to stores for consumers to purchase. It takes four to seven days for the eggs to travel from the farm to the store.



EGG TRIVIA

Did You Know...

- A laying hen can lay about 340 eggs in a year.
- There is no nutritional difference between brown and white eggs.
- As hens age the size of their egg increases too.
- Eggs are graded according to weight and not circumference.

Egg dictionary

- **Aviary:** Barns where hens have several levels where they perch, feed, drink and lay eggs in a nesting box. They are also free to fly down to floor level to scratch.
- **Biosecurity:** Practices or procedures set up to protect flocks of hens from disease. These can include locking the barn, preventing entry of wild animals or birds or changing clothes and boots when entering the barn.
- **Chick:** A newly hatched young chicken.
- **Candling:** A process that allows the grader to see the condition of the shell, if there are any cracks, the size of the air cell and whether the yolk is well-centred. This used to involve holding eggs over light produced by a candle, but now eggs are passed over a strong light to make the interior of the egg visible.
- **Conventional hen housing:** A housing system where the hens live in small social groups. This allows all hens to have equal access to fresh food and water.
- **Drinkers:** Automatic water lines in barns for poultry to drink from.
- **Enriched colony housing:** A type of housing system used on a growing number of Canadian egg farms. The units are furnished with perches, a curtained nesting area and sometimes a scratch area.
- **Feeders:** Automatic machines which dispense chicken feed (birds are given 24-hour access to feed).
- **Free run:** Hens have access to the whole barn floor.
- **Free range:** Hens have access to the whole barn floor or roam outside when the weather permits.
- **Fowl:** A bird of any kind. In the egg industry, “spent fowl” refers to hens that have finished laying eggs.
- **Flock:** A group of birds. In the egg sector, a flock is a group of hens.
- **Grading:** At the grading station eggs are washed, candled and divided into three grades. Canada Grade A eggs are sold in retail stores for household use and placed in cartons, based on their weight (not their circumference).
- **Layer farm:** Where laying hens are housed. Hens lay eggs for 52 to 60 weeks. During this time they can lay more than 300 eggs.
- **Laying hen:** A female chicken that lays eggs. On average, hens start laying eggs at 18 to 20 weeks of age.
- **Pullet farm:** Where young birds are raised from day old chicks to 18-20 weeks of age when they will be transported to a layer farm.
- **Pullet:** A female chicken or young hen.
- **Rooster:** A male chicken.
- **Supply Management:** The system under which the Canadian egg industry runs. Supply management balances supply with demand and prevents overproduction, flooded markets and depressed prices for farmers. It allows for a stable and predictable market for farmers, while ensuring a constant supply of eggs at a reasonable price for consumers.



About eggs – additional website links

FarmFood360.ca (Virtual Egg Farm Tours)
www.farmfood360.ca

Coalition for Sustainable Egg Supply
www.sustainableeggcoalition.org

Egg Farmers of Ontario
www.getcracking.ca

Egg Nutrition Centre
www.eggnutritioncenter.org



Egg
FACT SHEET



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