

## THE “FREE RANGE” MYTH

In many commercial “free-range” or “cage-free” egg farms, hens are crowded inside windowless sheds, packed nearly wing to wing, with little or no access to the outdoors. Just like battery cage hens, “free-range” hens are sent to slaughter once their egg production declines and their baby brothers are disposed of at the hatchery.<sup>[14]</sup>

The best thing consumers can do is avoid eggs completely.



A typical “free range” egg barn.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Chickens are inquisitive animals who, when in natural surroundings, enjoy dust-bathing, making nests, roosting in trees, and searching for food.

Like us, chickens form friendships and strong family ties. They love their young and mourn the loss of loved ones.

According to animal behaviorist Dr. Chris Evans, chickens are as smart as mammals, including some primates. He explains that chickens are able to understand that recently hidden objects still exist, which is beyond the capacity of small children.

## References

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Canadians for Ethical Treatment of Farmed Animals  
(CETFA)  
[cetfa.org](http://cetfa.org)  
[care@cetfa.org](mailto:care@cetfa.org)



## Egg-Laying Chickens

Each Canadian consumes over 16 dozen eggs per year.<sup>[1]</sup> Nearly all of the 35 million chickens raised to lay these eggs are forced to live crammed together inside battery cages<sup>[2]</sup>, small barren wire cages stacked in rows inside filthy windowless sheds that can stretch the length of two football fields.



95% of Canadian eggs are from hens crowded into wire battery cages the size of filing drawers stacked in tiers. Ontario egg barn.

Typical battery cages confine five to 11 hens. With each hen given an area to live on that is less than a standard 8.5" x 11" piece of paper, they are unable to walk freely or even fully stretch their wings.<sup>[3]</sup>

Virtually every natural instinct and desire is thwarted by the battery cage, denying the hens the ability to build a nest, forage, roost, dust bathe, see the sun, or even feel the earth or grass beneath their feet.



In addition to the severe mental and social deprivation, forcing a naturally active bird to spend her entire life in a cramped and nearly stationary position causes numerous health problems including lameness, bone brittleness, and muscle weakness.<sup>[4]</sup> Nearly 30% of hens have broken bones at the time they are slaughtered.<sup>[5]</sup>

Sickness and disease run rampant in these squalid living conditions, but in an attempt to minimize costs, even the sickest of hens are denied veterinary care.



*Sick factory farmed animals receive no vet care. Dead hens in Alberta egg barn.*

Since 2005, undercover investigations in Canadian egg barns have illustrated that cruelty is not the exception, but rather the rule.<sup>[6,7,8]</sup> The investigations have documented the following widespread abuses:

- Hens with broken and feces-covered feathers packed into tiny wire battery cages so small they cannot even spread their wings.
- Diseased hens suffering from large, untreated growths and infections, as well as blindness.
- Hens trapped in the wire of their

cages, left without any access to food or water.

- Dead hens left to decompose in cages with live hens still producing eggs for human consumption.
- Hens who have escaped their cages wandering in manure pits with no access to water.



*L: Hen with broken leg; R: Hen with broken and missing feathers. Rescued from Ontario egg barn.*

For every egg-laying hen confined in a battery cage, there is a male chick who was killed at the hatchery. Because egg-laying chicken breeds have been genetically engineered exclusively for maximum egg production, they don't grow large enough or quickly enough to be profitably raised for meat. Consequently, male chicks of egg-laying breeds are of no economic value and are discarded the very day they hatch, usually by the cheapest, most convenient means available - suffocation in plastic bags, decapitation, gassing, being left to die in dumpsters, or being thrown alive into grinders.<sup>[9,10,11]</sup>

Once a hen's egg production declines, she will either be slaughtered for low-grade chicken meat products or disposed of like her brothers by being thrown alive into a

grinding machine.<sup>[12]</sup>

Hens who are shipped to slaughterhouses have their food and water withdrawn for two to five days to further weaken them and make them easier to catch.<sup>[13]</sup>



*Chickens are gathered hastily, up to eight at a time. Their legs and wings often break in the process. Egg-laying chicken barn in Ontario.*

During “depopulation”, workers chaotically thrust their hands into the battery cages, grabbing and pulling the hens out by one leg. The fragile hens are then slammed into transport crates - 12 to 16 birds per crate. Cruelty documented by CETFA investigators during the catching of egg-laying hens includes:

- Workers stomping on escaping hens or throwing them like basketballs.
- Workers ripping out the throats of hens, tearing off their heads or legs, or breaking the birds' fragile wings, legs or necks.
- Dropped hens left to drown or suffocate to death in manure pits.