



Battery-Cage Egg Production in the United States

Who is Watching the Hen House?

Imagine spending your life in a small closet with several other people. Regardless of expectations this would be difficult. A hen enclosed in a battery cage system can expect to spend a relatively short life enclosed in a small cage which they will share with several other birds. The problem with this is in how these birds are not able to engage in behaviors which are considered normal for hens. It is because of these conditions hens then act in violent and cannibalistic ways towards other birds in the cage. One of these behaviors is plucking at one of the hens in the cage until it dies. A solution to this problem has come in the form of debeaking the hens. This is a very painful procedure because the beak is attached to the central nervous system. It would not be much different than someone cutting off a human nose. Additionally, this is a band-aid response to problem that could be solved through better care of hens.

The free-range system is also by no means perfect. A free range system is where hens are not enclosed in cages and allowed outside access. However, in free range systems there are also problems with debeaking. In addition, both systems allow for forced molting through starving the bird. Free-range also tends to be more expensive.

The main problem here is that although the FDA regulates egg production the USDA is the department that regulates hens. How are two such large entities to communicate with one another?

Moreover, the way eggs are labeled in the United States presents a problem with hen treatment because what we think a label is telling us may not necessarily be what is happening. The only label that represents an absence of inhumane treatment is the Humane Certified label.

"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

Mohandas Gandhi



Debeaking is clipping off the beak of the bird. The practice is very painful for the bird because the beak is connected with the central nervous system.

How can one find eggs that are locally produced?

Food Routes

<http://www.foodroutes.org/localfood/>

Local Harvest

<http://www.localharvest.org/>



Ten Things Every Consumer Should Know About Egg Labels in the United States.

1. Closed cage systems lead to higher instances of chickens violently attacking one another.
2. Battery-cages are used in 95% of U.S. egg production.
3. Free Range means very little by USDA standards because it is not really regulated.
4. Although the free-range system is far from perfect it does allow for the more natural movement and behavior of hens.
5. Certified Organic means the hens are not caged and allowed outside, but it has nothing to do with hen treatment.
6. Free Roaming just means there is no cage, not that they are outside.
7. United Egg Producer Certified permits cruel treatment.
8. Humane Certified is the only label that looks at humane treatment and does not allow debeaking, forced molting through starvation, or closed cage systems.
9. How the hen is fed and the nutritional value of the egg has nothing to do with the treatment of the hens.
10. In 2012 the European Union will have a ban in place on small cage systems.

Things you can do...

1. Read labels critically and find out what the terms actually mean.
2. Buy eggs from local farms.
3. Tell your local grocer to stock **Humane Certified** eggs.
4. Talk with friends and family.

Information Sources:

Farm Animal Welfare Council <http://www.fawc.org.uk>
 The Humane Society of the United States <http://www.hsus.org>
 Pollan, M. (2006) *Omnivore's Dilemma*. The Penguin Press: New York.
 Schlosser, E. (2002) *Fast Food Nation*. Houghton Mifflin New York: NY
 United Poultry Concerns <http://upc-online.org>

Images: www.tryveg.com, www.vnv.org.au, & www.realmeat.co.uk

How you can learn more...

1. The Humane Society of the United States <http://www.hsus.org>
2. Farm Animal Welfare Council <http://www.fawc.org.uk>
3. United Poultry Concerns <http://upc-online.org>

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