

A comparison of farm animal care standards for egg laying hens

The table on the following pages is intended to outline the major differences between new and existing farm animal care standards for egg laying hens in Canada. In terms of animal welfare, SPCA Certified and Certified Organic standards exceed standards outlined in industry-developed documents like the Codes of Practice, and have more thorough processes in place to ensure compliance.

The following bullet points provide a brief overview of the programs compared in this document:

- **Code of Practice, Laying Hens (2017)** – The Code is a national standard developed under the guidance of the [National Farm Animal Care Council](#) (NFAACC). However, compliance with the Code is not regulated by law, nor is it enforced by government unless animal cruelty is suspected or reported. Note: the egg industry has agreed to a phase out of battery cages for housing egg laying hens by 2036. In the interim, a number of “transitional” requirements have been put in place to bridge the gap between publication of the revised Code and completion of the phase out.
- **SPCA Certified Standard, Laying Hens (2017)** – The [SPCA Certified program](#) is a farm certification and food-labelling program dedicated to improving farm animal welfare standards in Canada. Program enrollment is voluntary. Compliance is enforced using annual on-farm assessments by third party Validators and a review conducted by a third party review panel. Program standards follow the [Five Freedoms](#) for animal welfare.
- **Canadian Organic Standards (2015)** – The [Canadian Organic program](#) is dedicated to ensuring the quality of organically produced foods through compliance with organic production standards and processes. Compliance is enforced using on-farm assessments by trained inspectors. Certification is determined by the organic certification body.
- **Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)** – The government body that reviews food packaging and related marketing materials under the federal acts and regulations. Labels that have not gone through the review process could feature information that misleads consumers. For more about CFIA policies and procedures, or to submit your comments and feedback on food labelling, please visit the CFIA website at www.inspection.gc.ca. For more about food labels and what they mean, check out our [BC SPCA food labelling factsheet](#).

A glossary of terms is available on the last page of this document.

Animal Welfare Standards at a Glance: Egg Laying Hens

Comparison of Canada's Codes of Practice, SPCA Certified Standards and Canadian Organic Standards

	Codes of Practice (2017) Canada's minimum required standard of care 	SPCA Certified Standards (2017) 	Canadian Organic Standards (2015) 
Housing types permitted	Battery cages permitted until 2036; enriched cages permitted; can also be in aviaries, or on floor as free-run or free-range birds	Cage-free, indoor (free-run) or outdoor (free-range)	Cage-free, indoor plus outdoor access (free-range only)
Outdoor access	Optional	Required (weather permitting) if labelled free-range	Outdoor access required (weather permitting; exceptions for young birds)
Popholes (exits to the outdoors)	Must be a minimum of 35cm high and 40cm wide and distributed throughout the barn	Must provide at least 1 pophole (minimum 40cm wide) per 132 birds; each pophole must be at least 45cm high and 40cm wide	Must provide minimum of 2 (50cm) popholes or 2m per 1,000 hens; minimum height 35cm
Shade & shelter (outdoors)	Must have access to a structure that protects them from environmental conditions	Shade and shelter required on pasture	Shade/shelter required
Predator protection (outdoors)	Perimeter fencing required	Overhead protection and perimeter fencing required; predator control must be humane	Protection from predators required but types/methods not specified
Space per hen	Battery cages: 432cm ² /white hen and 484cm ² /brown hen (21-23 hens/m ²) Enriched cages: 750cm ² /hen (13 hens/m ²); minimum 45cm to top of cage Cage-free with all-litter floor: 1,900cm ² / hen (5 hens/m ²) Cage-free, partially-slatted: 929 cm ² /hen (11-17 hens/m ²); minimum 45cm between floor and ceiling of each level	All-litter floors: 1,900cm ² /hen (5 hens/m ²) Partially-slatted: 1,111cm ² /hen (9 hens/m ²) Fully-slatted floors: Prohibited Outdoors: 1,900cm ² /hen (5 hens/m ²) <u>Point of reference:</u> This page is set to print on standard 28cm x 21.5cm paper, which = 602cm² (equivalent to 8.5" x 11" or A4 size)	Indoor area (all-litter or partially-slatted floors): 1,667cm ² /hen (6 hens/m ²) Fully-slatted floors: Prohibited Outdoor run: 2,500cm ² /hen (4 hens/m ²)

Continued...	Codes of Practice (2017) Canada's minimum required standard of care 	SPCA Certified Standards (2017) 	Canadian Organic Standards (2015) 
Flooring types & litter requirements (indoors)	<p>Battery cages: Litter not required</p> <p>Enriched cages: 25cm²/hen litter required; 31cm²/hen litter required for barns built after April 1, 2017 or flocks place after Jan. 1, 2022</p> <p>Cage-free systems built <u>before</u> April 1, 2017: 15cm²/hen foraging space required in single-tier systems and a minimum of 1 foraging site per 1,500 hens. In multi-tier systems, 33% of floor space must be litter for birds over 24 weeks (15% for birds under 24 weeks old).</p> <p>Cage-free systems built <u>after</u> April 1, 2017: 15% (single-tier systems) or 33% (multi-tier systems) of floor space must be litter (15% for birds under 24 weeks old).</p>	<p>Birds must have access to a litter area to permit foraging, scratching and dust bathing; fully-slatted flooring is prohibited</p> <p>Litter area must be provided as follows:</p> <p>Free-run systems: 50% of floor space (minimum 556 cm²/hen)</p> <p>Free-range systems: 30% of floor space (minimum 367 cm²/hen)</p> <p>All-litter systems: 100% of floor space (minimum 1,900 cm²/hen)</p>	<p>Litter is required; fully-slatted flooring is prohibited</p> <p>Minimum 30% solid flooring to accommodate litter use</p>
Perches	<p>Perches not required in battery cages and not required for cage-free systems built before April 1, 2017 until January 1, 2020.</p> <p>As of January 1, 2020, cage-free systems designed/built before April 1, 2017 must provide 7.6cm perch space per hen. At least 20% of perches must be a minimum 40cm off the floor.</p> <p>Flocks in enriched cages must provide 11.2cm/hen. After January 1, 2022 perch space must increase to 15cm/hen.</p> <p>All systems designed/built after April 1, 2017 must provide 15cm perch space per hen. For cage-free systems, at least 20% of perches must be a minimum 40cm off the floor.</p>	<p>15cm linear perch space required per bird regardless of when the barn was built</p> <p>All perches must be at least 30cm off the floor, with at least 20% of perches raised a minimum of 40cm off the floor.</p>	<p>18cm/hen of perch space required. The use of raised floors as perch space is permitted.</p>

To receive full versions of the documents listed above, visit the [National Farm Animal Care Council](#), [SPCA Certified](#) and the [Canada Organic Regime](#).

Continued...	Codes of Practice (2017) Canada's minimum required standard of care 	SPCA Certified Standards (2017) 	Canadian Organic Standards (2015) 
Nests & nesting material	Minimum 1m ² /120 hens for community nests "The floor of the nest area must be covered with a surface that promotes nesting and prevents injury"	Maximum 5 hens per individual nest; minimum 1m ² /120 hens for community nests; suitable nesting material must be provided to hens	Laying hens "shall have access to an adequate number of nests" (number not specified). Type of nesting material not specified.
Feeder space	Accessible feed space must be a minimum of 7.0cm/hen	Accessible feed space must be a minimum of 7.0cm/hen	Refers to Code of Practice requirements
Feed	Must be available at all times; can be withdrawn prior to transport but maximum withdrawal time not specified	Must be available at all times; must be nutritionally balanced for hens and include a separate source of calcium	No specifics on feed withdrawal limits; feed must be certified organic
Antibiotics & hormones	No mention of antibiotic or hormone use, whether permitted or prohibited, as a preventative therapy or for performance (growth) enhancement, or whether antibiotics can be added to feed or water.	Prohibited for growth promotion and as a preventative therapy for diseases. Permitted only for veterinary treatment of animals diagnosed as injured or ill.	Prohibited. Must not be used to promote or retard growth, or as a preventative therapy. Products from birds treated with antibiotics cannot be sold or marketed as organic.
Drinking space	Minimum 1 waterer for every 12 birds Minimum 2 water sources (e.g. nipple drinkers, cups) or 1 bell drinker per 100 hens OR Minimum 1.3 linear cm of water trough space per hen when straight troughs are used	Accessible water space: 4.0cm/hen OR Maximum 10 birds per water nipple or cup Minimum 2 drinkers per flock (for small flocks)	Refers to Code of Practice requirements
Water availability / restriction	Must be provided at all times and up until catching for transport; must have plan for providing water during emergency events; water must be tested annually	Water must be available at all times and up until catching for transport; emergency back-up supply also required	Birds shall be provided with "clean, fresh water"; annual water quality testing required
Induced moulting	Controlled moulting permitted in emergency situations with vet and nutritionist oversight, and cannot involve feed or water withdrawal	Forced and controlled moulting is prohibited	Forced and controlled moulting is prohibited

Continued...	Codes of Practice (2017) Canada's minimum required standard of care 	SPCA Certified Standards (2017) 	Canadian Organic Standards (2015) 
Ventilation & air quality	Action must be taken to manage ammonia levels if they reach 20-25ppm	Must monitor ammonia levels (keep below 25ppm); must maintain low levels of dust and carbon dioxide	Humidity, dust and ammonia levels shall not impair the well-being of animals; ammonia levels not to exceed 25ppm
Painful procedures	Beak trimming permitted before 10 days of age, or older if an emergency (e.g. cannibalism outbreak). Must not remove more than 1/3 of the top beak between the tip and the entrance to the nostrils.	Beak trimming only permitted in circumstances necessary for emergency welfare reasons when all other measures to control problem behaviour have failed. Veterinary oversight is required and only the tip of the upper beak (the sharp hook) can be trimmed.	Beak trimming permitted only when necessary to control problem behaviour or to treat an injury
Bird handling	No specifics on how to carry birds	Preference for carrying hens upright. If carried upside down, must hold both legs and no more than 2 birds per hand.	No specifics on how to carry birds
Transport	"Pre-transport feed withdrawal must be managed to minimize the time that birds are off feed" Water must be available up to catching Recommended maximum transport time is 36 hours	Feed and water must be provided up to catching. Time from catching to slaughter, including transport, must not exceed 12 hours (preferably less than 8 hours) so that feed and water are not withdrawn for any longer.	No specifics on feed or water withdrawal pre-transport. Duration of transportation shall be "as short as possible". If journey is over 5 hours, farmers are encouraged to follow the Transport Code of Practice RE: recommended rest times, feed and water provision. If the recommendations are not followed, justification is required.
Standards development process	Developed through a consensus process. Involves input from scientists, vets, industry representatives, humane organizations and the public. A Code Development Committee has final approval.	Developed through an evidence-based approach. Applies animal welfare research to meet animals' needs. Involves input from scientists, vets, and producers. BC SPCA has final approval.	Developed through a consensus process. Standards held by Canadian General Standards Board secretariat. Organic industry has final approval.

Glossary:

Aviary system – A cage-free housing system used for egg laying hens that contains one (single-tier) or more (multi-tier) levels of flooring.

Animal welfare – Good animal welfare typically follows the [Five Freedoms](#): 1) Freedom from hunger and thirst, 2) Freedom from pain, injury, and disease, 3) Freedom from distress, 4) Freedom from discomfort, and 5) Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being (e.g. nest building, rooting, exploration, play, socialization). The [SPCA Certified](#) program is centered on the Five Freedoms.

Dust bathing – A behaviour that allows birds to clean their skin and feathers by first coating themselves in dust then shaking off old dust-soaked oils and microorganisms from their feathers. Following dust bathing, birds then preen to distribute fresh oils from a gland above their tail throughout their feathers to recondition them.

Foraging behaviour – A behaviour performed by hens in which they peck and scratch at the ground in search of food.

Foraging site – A site that provides hens with the opportunity to perform foraging behaviour (see definition above).

Free-range – A cage-free indoor environment that provides birds with outdoor access, weather permitting.

Free-run – A cage-free indoor environment. No outdoor access is provided.

Litter – A combination of poultry manure, shed feathers and feed dust with a bedding material (e.g. untreated wood shavings, straw) that covers the floor in a barn. Litter has the effect of adding comfort as well as promoting natural hen behaviours such as foraging and dust bathing (see definitions above).

Multi-tier system – See ‘Aviary System’.

Popholes – Openings (exits) in a barn that allow birds to move from the indoor environment to the outdoor environment in free-range systems.

Single-tier system – See ‘Aviary System’.

Specialty egg production – According to the BC EMB, specialty eggs include free-run, free-range, and certified organic free-range eggs, as well as eggs from hens with specific feed requirements (e.g. Omega-3). Specialty eggs do not necessarily come from chickens that have been raised more humanely. As of August 2017, approximately 17% of B.C. egg laying hen flocks were being raised cage-free (i.e. free-run, free-range or organic).



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