

# A comparison between new and existing farm animal care standards for egg-laying chickens in Canada and BC

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This document is intended to outline the major differences between new and existing farm animal care standards for egg laying chickens in Canada and in British Columbia. In terms of animal welfare<sup>1</sup>, SPCA Certified and Certified Organic standards generally exceed standards outlined in industry-developed documents like the Codes of Practice, and have processes in place to ensure compliance.

The following bullet points provide a brief overview of the programs compared in this document (standards, pg. 2, 3; inspection processes, pg. 3):

- **Recommended Code of Practice, Laying Hens (2003)** – The Code is a national standard now developed under the guidance of the National Farm Animal Care Council ([NFACC](#)). However, compliance with the Code is not regulated by law, nor is it enforced by government unless animal cruelty is suspected or reported.
- **BC Egg Marketing Board (EMB) certification** – This program will be overseen by BC Specialty Egg<sup>2</sup> Producers Association (BCSEPA). In general, BC EMB free-run and free-range standards follow the Recommended Code of Practice for Laying Hens (2003).
  - **Free-run<sup>3</sup> certification** – Mandatory in BC. Will ensure that BC egg producers raising free-run chickens comply with criteria that distinguish free-run environments from free-range and caged housing environments.
  - **Free-range<sup>4</sup> certification** – Mandatory in BC. Will ensure that BC egg producers raising free-range chickens comply with criteria that distinguish free-range environments from free-run and caged housing environments.
- **SPCA Certified Standard, Laying Hens (2009)** – 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 (see definition, pg. 4).
- **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](http://www.inspection.gc.ca). For more about which labels to be wary of, read the BC SPCA factsheet '[Interpreting food labeling claims](#)'.

<sup>1, 2, 3, 4</sup> Glossary on page 4

**STANDARDS**

	<b>Recommended Code of Practice - Laying Hens (2003)</b>	<b>BC Egg Marketing Board free-run certification (2013)</b>	<b>BC Egg Marketing Board free-range certification (2013)</b>	<b>SPCA Certified Standard - Laying Hens (2009)</b>	<b>Canadian Organic Standards (2015)</b>
<b>Housing types permitted</b>	Cages permitted; can also be in aviaries, or on floor as free-run or free-range birds	Cage-free, indoor (free-run) only	Cage-free, indoor plus outdoor access (i.e. free-range)	Cage-free, indoor (free-run), outdoor (free-range)	Cage-free, indoor plus outdoor access (free-range)
<b>Outdoor access / shade and shelter on range</b>	Optional	No outdoor access	Constant daytime access to outdoors required; shade/shelter "should" be provided	Required (weather permitting) if labelled free-range; shade and shelter required on pasture	Outdoor access required (weather permitting; exceptions for young birds); shade/shelter required
<b>Popholes</b>	No requirements or specifications for the size or number of popholes provided to free-range birds	N/a	No requirements or specifications for the size or number of popholes provided	Must provide at least 1 pophole (min 30cm wide) per 100 birds; each pophole must be at least 45cm high	Must provide minimum of 2 (50cm) popholes or 2m per 1,000 hens; minimum height 35cm
<b>Predator protection (outdoors)</b>	Perimeter fencing required	Discs or reflective tape required		Overhead protection and fencing required; control must be humane	Required but types not specified
<b>Floor space (indoor)</b>	BC EMB requirements for floor space are based on the Code of Practice, which state:  Barn with 100% litter floor: 1700cm <sup>2</sup> /adult white hen; 1900cm <sup>2</sup> /adult brown hen;  For 100% slats with no litter: 850cm <sup>2</sup> /adult white hen; 950cm <sup>2</sup> /adult brown hen			100% litter: 1900cm <sup>2</sup> /hen; Partial* litter: 1111cm <sup>2</sup> /hen (*no less than 50% litter in free-run systems; no less than 30% in free-range systems)	Indoor area - 1667cm <sup>2</sup> /hen; outdoor run - 2500cm <sup>2</sup> /hen
<b>Flooring types (indoor)</b>	BC EMB requirements for floor space are based on the Code of Practice: Litter (i.e. bedding) is not required; 100% slatted flooring is permitted			Birds must have access to clean litter area; 100% slatted flooring is prohibited	Litter is required; 100% slatted flooring is prohibited
<b>Feeder space</b>	A min feed space requirement (listed as a range) is prescribed in the Code of Practice; the BC EMB requirements follow the Code of Practice			Min feed space required is upper end of range in Code	Same as Code of Practice
<b>Water space / drinker number</b>	A min water space requirement (listed as a range) is prescribed in the Code of Practice; the BC EMB requirements follow the Code of Practice			Min water space required is upper end of range in Code	Same as Code of Practice
<b>Water availability</b>	BC EMB requirements for water availability are based on the Code of Practice, which state: weather temps 26-28°C - water can be withheld up to 12 hours weather temps 28-30°C - water can be withheld up to 6 hours weather temps over 30°C - water can be withheld up to 2 hours			water must be available at all times; emergency back-up supply also required	Birds shall be provided with "clean, fresh water"; annual water quality testing required
<b>Nests</b>	BC EMB requirements for nest availability are based on the Code of Practice, which state: a minimum of 20 individual nests per 100 hens is required (i.e. 5 hens per nest); space/amount of community and roll-away nests not specified; nests must not be too high above the floor			Max 5 hens/individual nest; min 1m <sup>2</sup> /120 hens for community nests	Laying hens "shall have access to an adequate number of nests" (number not specified)
<b>Nesting material</b>	Not required			Suitable nesting material must be provided to hens	Not specified
<b>Dust bathing material</b>	Not required			Dust bathing material must be provided to hens	

**STANDARDS cont...**

	<b>Recommended Code of Practice - Laying Hens (2003)</b>	<b>BC Egg Marketing Board free-run certification (2013)</b>	<b>BC Egg Marketing Board free-range certification (2013)</b>	<b>SPCA Certified Standard - Laying Hens (2009)</b>	<b>Canadian Organic Standards (2015)</b>
<b>Perches</b>	"Ensure an adequate number and length of perches are provided"	Not required		15cm linear perch space required per bird; must be at least 30cm off floor	18cm/hen of perch space required (includes raised floors)
<b>Ventilation &amp; air quality</b>	Ammonia concentrations over 25ppm are not acceptable	No requirements listed		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
<b>Light intensity</b>	Intensity should allow for normal activity, feed and water intake; specific intensity only set for first 3 days of life	"All barns require adequate lighting"		Specific intensities set to maintain bird health and normal behaviour; natural daylight encouraged	Follows natural daylight with some exceptions

**INSPECTION AND REVIEW PROCESSES**

<b>Frequency of on-farm inspections to ensure requirements are met</b>	None - compliance with the Code is voluntary and would only be assessed by an Officer if animal cruelty is suspected	Year 1 (2013-14) - mandatory for all BC free-run egg producers Year 2 and on - 25% of BC free-run egg producers chosen for random audit	Year 1 (2013-14) - mandatory for all BC free-range egg producers Year 2 and on - 25% of BC free-range egg producers chosen for random audit	Annually plus an additional 10% of farms subject to an unannounced inspection per year; farms meeting all requirements for 2 consecutive assessments are inspected every second year	Annually plus an additional 3% of farms subject to an unannounced inspection per year; farms meeting all requirements during an assessment may be inspected every 2 or 3 years
<b>Validators / Auditors</b>	N/a	Liane Ross-Martin, LRM Inspection and Verification Services (a 3rd-party consultant hired by BC EMB)		Validators are independent, 3rd-party consultants trained to SPCA Certified program policies and procedures	Organic inspectors are trained to organic production policies and procedures
<b>Inspection and review process</b>	N/a	A consultant visually verifies that requirements are met and makes a recommendation to BC EMB as to whether or not the farm should be certified free-run/free-range		A Validator conducts a visual and paperwork audit which is then sent to an independent, 3rd-party review panel who reviews the Validator documents and decides whether to grant certification	An inspector conducts a visual and paperwork audit which is then sent to the certification body for review. A committee decides whether to grant certification
<b>Resolution of non-compliance issues</b>	N/a	Given 30 days or a date agreed upon by all parties to comply, then farm is re-inspected		Time period given to resolve non-compliance issues varies depending on the severity of the issue. Farms may be suspended or decertified in severe cases.	
<b>Labelling</b>	N/a	Certified farms produce what is considered a "specialty certified" egg; if the producer is also grading the certified product, they may obtain a logo from BC EMB that can be put on the egg carton indicating that it is now specialty certified (free-run or free-range)		SPCA Certified farmers are allowed to label their package with the SPCA Certified red barn logo, as approved by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency	Certified organic farmers are allowed to label their package with an organic logo approved by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA)

## Glossary:

- 1 **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.
- 2 **Specialty eggs** – 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. Presently, 12% of BC eggs fall within this category.
- 3 **Free-run** – A cage-free, indoor environment. No outdoor access is provided in free-run systems.
- 4 **Free-range** – A cage-free environment that provides animals with outdoor access.
- 5 **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, or distribute fresh oils throughout their feathers to recondition them.
- 6 **Popholes** – Openings in a barn that allow birds to move from the indoor environment to the outdoor, or free-range, environment in free-range systems.