



SPCA Certified farms are cage-free.



Hens can explore, dust-bathe, perch and use nest boxes.



The life of the egg-laying chicken

Everyone knows eggs come from chickens. But what do you know about the hens who lay the eggs?

It turns out, like our cats and dogs, hens have a wide range of emotional and social needs.

The behaviour of hens

In a natural setting, chickens explore and forage for food by scratching the ground. They spend about 70 percent of their day walking, scratching with their feet, stepping back and pecking at the ground in search of food. As well as finding food, the exercise keeps them fit and healthy.

Hens like to live in groups – flocks of about 1,000 other chickens. Within this flock, smaller sub-groups of birds form. Each has its own “pecking order” or social grouping. Similar to a whole school of kids made up of smaller groups of friends.

At night, hens like to perch up high to sleep – safe from predators. Their feet are designed to grip branches even when sleeping.

Chickens spend a lot of time grooming. They stretch their wings, flap and preen their feathers to keep them in order and water-proofed. They extract oil from a gland at the back of their tail and smooth the oil through their feathers.



Hen dust-bathing.



Cage-free hen resting on a perch.

To clean their feathers, hens dust-bathe in sandy soil. They roll and flick sand into their feathers. Oily dirt sticks to the sand and vigorous shaking removes the dirt and old oil. Then they reapply the oil.

A big event in a hen’s day is laying an egg. Hens lay about 320 eggs in a year – close to an egg a day. Before she lays an egg, the hen will search for a quiet, safe nesting place away from the larger group. A hen begins the hunt for a nest spot about an hour before she is due to lay her egg.

How hens are normally kept

Unfortunately, for 95 percent of hens raised in Canada, hens don’t have the freedom to do any of the behaviours described above. They don’t live in flocks but in very small cages called battery cages. Hens are crowded together with four or five other hens not of their choosing. They live that way their entire lives – from one to three years.

Each hen has about the same space as the size of this magazine. They stand on a wire floor their entire lives. There is no soil to scratch. They cannot stretch or flap their wings, or even stand up straight without hitting the cage top.

Hens can’t dust-bathe, perch or find a quiet nest box to lay their eggs. They must lay their eggs on the wire cage floor. As a result hens suffer greatly from frustration every day.

Why are hens kept in cages?

You might wonder why hens are kept this way if they suffer such frustration. The battery cage system was introduced in the 1940s. Previously, birds were kept on barn floors but there were problems with diseases. Plus, it was hard to gather the eggs. The caged systems made it possible to provide automatic feeding, drinking and egg collection. Most importantly, manure fell through the wire onto moving belts. The manure could be continuously taken out of the barn, reducing the spread of disease.

Another advantage of the caged system was that you could also get a lot more birds (30,000 is common) in a barn. All of these factors lowered costs for the farmers and resulted in less expensive eggs for you. But the cost to the hens is poor welfare.



95% of hens are housed in battery cages.



four to six birds per cage.



Hens stand on wire their entire lives.

Alternative egg laying systems

To improve the welfare for the hens, a few farmers are switching back to cage-free barns. The best systems are

designed to ensure hens can perform the behaviours they want to do. This means hens can forage, dust-bathe, stretch their wings, perch and lay their eggs in nest boxes. Most importantly, hens have the space and freedom to move about and form the groups they want to be with.

Hens from SPCA Certified farms are inspected to make sure the birds are both healthy and happy. Eggs farmed in this way do cost a little more than caged eggs, but the hens have a much better quality of life.



Farm Animal
Five Freedoms

THE **FIVE FREEDOMS** HELP ENSURE ANIMALS GET THE CARE THEY NEED. PLAY THE GAME TO DISCOVER WHAT THE **FIVE FREEDOMS** MEAN FOR FARM ANIMALS.

Freedom from hunger and thirst

Freedom 1
You install solar-
powered pumps so
cattle have clean,
fresh water
Ahead 1

Freedom 2
Four dairy cows have hurt feet that aren't getting treated

Freedom 3
You stop using
painful shock
cattle prods to
move cows
Ahead 3


Freedom 4

Instead of bare concrete, you add wood shavings as bedding for your pigs

Freedom 5

Freedom 1
It snowed and you forgot to
give the cattle hay

Freedom 2
A pig is getting picked on, so
you move him to another pen



Freedom 3
Your dog chases the chickens and some get injured

Freedom 4
It's smoking hot and your cattle have no shade out in the field

Go to
WEST

Freedom 5
You convert your
caged hen barn to
an SPCA Certified
free-range barn
Go to cage-free!

Freedom 1
The pigs' water
trough spills;
now your pigs
are super
thirsty

Go to VET!
Your chicks got sick because
the barn
Freedom 2
you didn't properly clean

Freedom from discomfort
Discomfort can mean not having bedding to sleep on; being too cold or too hot; or having too many flies in your face. Boredom is also a form of discomfort that can lead to distress.

Freedom 3 Ahead 3

Freedom 4
You stopped a farmhand
from kicking a cow
(and fired him)

Freedom 3
You never put any hay out
for your cattle and now
they are starving

Go to VET!

Freedom 2
When you
trimmed your
calves' horns,
you didn't give
pain medication
Go to VET!

Freedom 1
You make sure
your chickens
are fed twice
a day
Ahead 2

Freedom 5
You refuse to
switch your hands
from battery cages
to cage-free
learn more at
free!

Freedom 4
When winter temps drop,
automatic heaters warm
the hen house
Ahead 3

Freedom from distress

Freedom from pain, injury and disease
Progressive farmers give animals medication for painful practices such as cattle branding and dehorning; ensure sick animals are treated immediately; and keep their barns clean to prevent disease.

Freedom to express behaviours that promote well-being

Animals should be able to do what makes them feel content, satisfied and happy. They need to be able to do normal behaviours like exploring, grooming and foraging for food.

You need one die and player pieces, such as coins. Start at the barn. Take turns rolling the die and moving along the game board. Along the way you will land on squares that describe the care of farm animals linked to the Five Freedoms (read each before starting). You must roll the exact number to land on “The end” to win.



PICKING THE

Did you know that, with a brown egg, you can tell how stressed the hen was when she laid the egg just by looking at it?

The next time you're at the grocery store with your parents, take a peek inside a carton of brown eggs. See if you can spot a hazy layer of calcium – a chalky-white film – on one or more of the eggs.



Hens prefer to lay their eggs in a quiet, secluded nest. They become agitated, frustrated and stressed when they can't find one. Often this happens in barns that don't have enough nest boxes for all the hens.

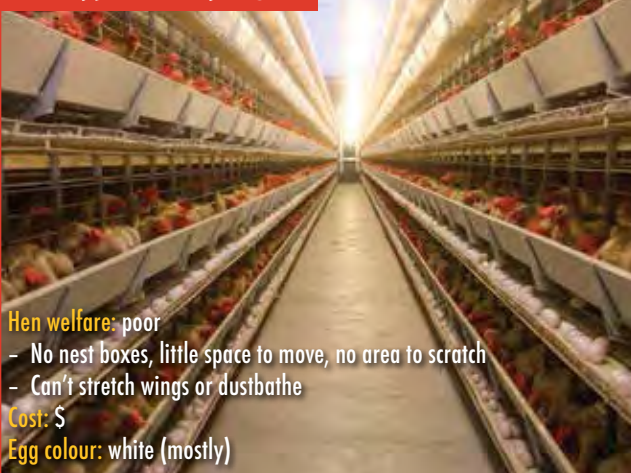
When a hen is kept from laying her egg, an extra layer of calcium starts to build on the egg's surface while she waits. The longer she has to wait, the more extra calcium coats the egg.

SO MANY EGG CHOICES, SO LITTLE TIME!

Grocery stores have lots of different types of eggs. Why so many? Eggs come from different farmers who

raise hens in different ways. Some are kept in cramped cages, while others have more room to move about.

Farm type: battery cages



Hen welfare: poor

- No nest boxes, little space to move, no area to scratch
- Can't stretch wings or dustbathe

Cost: \$

Egg colour: white (mostly)

Farm type: cage free*



Hen welfare: better

- No cages, some space to move, usually nest boxes, can stretch wings
- No independent inspections

*Free-range eggs: hens can go outside (in nice weather)

Free-run eggs: hens always live in a barn

Cost: \$\$

Egg colour: brown (mostly)



BEST EGGS

When buying eggs, pick a cage-free brand whose eggs are solid brown and have the least amount of calcium coating – or none at all. It means the hens were less stressed.



With white eggs, you can't see if there is extra calcium. But it is a sure bet that it would be on most white-shelled eggs. This is because most hens who lay white eggs are kept in tiny cages and have no nest boxes (see below). These hens are frustrated every day because they have no place to lay their eggs but on the wire floor amongst other chickens.



spcacertified.ca

Farm type: SPCA Certified and Certified Organic



Hen welfare: best

- Farms meet highest welfare standards
- Independently inspected each year
- No cages, lots of space to move, perches up high, nest boxes, can stretch wings and dustbathe

Cost: \$\$\$

Egg colour: brown (mostly)

Certified is best

SPCA Certified and Certified Organic eggs come from hens with the best welfare. Farms are independently inspected to strict rules about hen care and welfare needs. There are spaces to explore both inside and outside the barn, private nesting areas and perches up high to rest at night. These eggs cost the most but the hens have the best living conditions. These eggs are also typically brown.



Are brown eggs better?

Not necessarily! The colour of an egg is determined by the breed of chicken. White eggs come from **leghorn chickens** who are usually raised in cages. Most cage-free eggs are brown. They come from different breeds such as **Rhode Island reds**, **New Hampshires** and **Plymouth Rocks**.

MOOO...VING TOWARD THE FIVE FREEDOMS

Ever wonder how farm animals are treated? Animal welfare scientists created the “Five Freedoms” as a tool to measure how well farmers are meeting their animals’ needs. The BC SPCA expects all farm animals to be provided the Five Freedoms – unfortunately, not all receive them.

The basics of food and water are covered by **Freedom 1**. For example, out on the range, cattle need fresh, clean water and good quality grass to eat.

All animals feel pain if they are injured, sick or we do things to them that hurt. When dairy cows have their horns removed, for example, pain medication helps it hurt less. That’s **Freedom 2** – minimizing pain.

Freedom from distress is **Freedom 3**. Being tied to your bed your whole life would be distressing, right? Yet that’s what mother pigs (sows) experience. They’re confined to a small cage (called a gestation stall) almost their whole lives.

Imagine having to sleep on cold, hard concrete. This is the life of most pigs. If farmers added wood shavings as bedding, they would meet **Freedom 4** – freedom from discomfort.

Picture a dairy cow looking out onto a field of lush green grass yet never getting to leave the barn – ever! Imagine you’re a hen living in a cage with other chickens packed so tight you couldn’t stretch your wings – ever! **Freedom 5** is all about having the freedom to do what comes naturally – like grazing on pasture or stretching wings.

To learn more about farm animal needs, play the **Farm Animal Five Freedoms** game on the next page. →



Getting to Know Chickens

Chickens are intelligent and social animals. Check out some of their cool features:

Chickens have a beak but no teeth. Food passes through the gullet to their digestive system. Chickens have a muscular gizzard containing grit (sand particles) to grind up food. Chickens like to eat small bugs, worms, grasses and seeds.

A chicken's eyes are on the side of their head allowing them to see more around them, including predators. However, it means they can't see directly in front of them. To compensate, they bob their heads back and forth to see what's in front of them and how close the object is to them.

Did You Know?

In many cases, you can tell the colour of the egg that a hen will lay by looking at her earlobe. If the lobe is **brown**, she will lay **brown** eggs, if it is **white**, she'll produce a **white** egg.

The **comb and wattles** are fleshy parts on the top of the head and under the chin. Blood circulates between the comb and wattles and helps to cool the chicken.

Domesticated chickens cannot fly great distances even though their bodies are well adapted to flight. Their bones are hollow, plus they have 13 air sacs throughout their bodies.

Disc shaped earlobes are located on each side of the head hidden by tiny feathers.

Feathers offer protection from cold, rain and UV light. Up close feathers have long, thin, hair-like strands called barbs. Like a zipper, smaller strands called barbules branch off of the barbs and hold them together. When the barbs pull apart, they are not effective for insulation or waterproofing. To fix this, chickens preen themselves by running their beaks through their feathers to force the barbs back together - zipping up the gaps.



The barb vs barbule

Why the scaly feet and legs? There doesn't seem to be a function for scales on chicken legs and feet. Scientific theories suggest that birds (and humans) evolved from reptiles and this is probably a residual reptilian trait. The scales do help protect the chickens' feet while scratching and digging for food.

Eggstra! Eggstra!

Who Laid
Your Egg



Five to seven hens are housed in one single cage for their entire lives. Farmers are only required to give them 432cm² (less than one page of Bark! magazine) of floor space per bird.

COURTESY VANCOUVER HUMANE SOCIETY

Battery cage, upon battery cage, you can't even see the end of the line.

Conventional Farming Practices



COURTESY MICHELLE JENDRAL

Yikes! Those claws are long!

Chickens stand on wire flooring all their lives — from one to three years. There is no opportunity to scratch, explore or wear down their claws.

Each year in BC, more than two million hens lay 636 million eggs. Try the math - that's approximately 275 eggs a year per hen. Ninety-eight percent of these birds live on conventional egg laying farms where groups of hens are housed in cramped battery cages. But are battery cages necessary for egg production? Egg farmers like them because they allow a large number (up to tens of thousands) of chickens to produce eggs in efficient and orderly



COURTESY ANDREA MAENZA

Meal time, a hen squeezing her head out of her cage to feed & drink.

Artificial light sources are used to keep chickens awake longer — keeping egg production high but decreasing sleep and rest times.



Walking up to the food and water buffet.

Farmers must provide more space for feeding and drinking to minimize conflict when hens go to eat.



COURTESY COMPASSION OVER KILLING

A line of eggs moving down the belt.

Hens are forced to lay eggs on the floor of battery cages. Once laid, the egg rolls down the wire floor and are taken away by a conveyor belt, right in front of the hens.

Chickens, like many animals, live in a social hierarchy - or a pecking order. This system determines things such as, which chicken gets to eat first or who gets to lay eggs or roost in the best spot. Farmers and researchers are looking at ways to improve the housing of chickens to minimize aggression due to pecking order.

g?



Hens in a SPCA Certified environment — exploring, scratching and pecking the ground — all natural chicken behaviours.

conditions. This equals low costs to the farmer and low market prices for the consumer. But in the end, the welfare of the chickens is sacrificed. The BC SPCA has developed standards that allow for better conditions for farm animals. The program is called SPCA Certified. This is a comparison of conventional farm practices (left) versus SPCA Certified (right).

SPCA Certified Farming Practices



Bath time keeps hens mite-free.

There must be an area covered by litter - usually sawdust. Dust bathing areas must also be provided. In natural surroundings, chickens rid their bodies of pesky mites that live at the base of their feathers by dust bathing - rolling in dirt or sawdust to suffocate the parasites.

No battery cages allowed. Chickens run free in a barn or outside and have at least 1900cm² of floor space (just over three pages of Bark!)

There must be at least one nesting box (refuge to lay eggs) for every five birds on site. This gives hens the opportunity to lay their eggs in a quiet and safe spot.



A choice of nesting boxes.

There are limits on length of periods of light and light intensity. Perches must be provided. Chickens naturally find a higher perching place to rest or sleep. Perching also keeps their legs strong.



Zzzz... settling down for bedtime or cozy nap.



www.sPCA.bc.ca/farm

Look for the Red Barn label

If you are looking for farm animal products where there are high welfare standards, consider buying SPCA Certified or BC Certified Organic food products. The

SPCA currently has 20 farmers in the program and you can find eggs, chicken, beef and cheese - all with the SPCA Certified label. Some of the major grocery stores that carry SPCA Certified products include:

Capers, Choices, Thrifty Foods, Nature's Fair and Save-On-Foods/Overwaitea. To see profiles of the farms in SPCA Certified visit www.sPCA.bc.ca/farm.

