



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.



Life's a barn for dairy cows

Everyone knows that milk comes from cows. Milk is also turned into products such as cheese, butter, ice cream, yogurt and cream cheese. But what do you know about dairy cows? Did you know, for example, there are over a million dairy cows in Canada? Or that most dairy cows live their entire lives inside barns, never getting to walk on grass?

Cows are social animals

Cattle are gentle, friendly animals who prefer to live in social groups – herds. Like you and your friends, cattle form close bonds with some members of their herd. Cows are so social that when left all alone, a cow can get quite distressed. She will vocalize, calling out to other cattle for connection.

Milk machines

Dairy cattle have thin, tall, bony frames while beef cattle are shorter and stockier. Dairy cows have been purposefully bred to produce large quantities of milk. Fifty years ago a dairy cow produced only a quarter of what a cow does now. Today's cows produce about 45 litres of milk a day – that's 200 glasses – which is much more than they would need to raise a single calf.

Life for a dairy cow

When your grandparents were kids, in nice weather dairy cows usually grazed all day on pasture (grass). They would be let out of the barn after morning milking and brought in for milking again in the evening.

They would spend the night in the barn. Today very few farms let their dairy cows outside, even if the weather is good. Instead they live their entire lives in barns. Cows kept indoors are easier to feed and care for. They are



Ouch! Overgrown hooves are painful.

fed a mixture of dry grass hay, dry alfalfa hay, grains as well as corn and grass silage (fermented cut grass that is still moist and green). The average dairy farm in B.C. has 120 milking cows.

Lameness

Cow lameness is a huge animal welfare issue. Cows get up and down up to 14 times a day. Because they are so large (1,200 lbs.), they can easily develop sore feet and leg injuries from standing and slipping on the concrete floors, or lying on hard surfaces such as concrete or rubber mats. Sometimes these injuries aren't noticed right away,

In free-stall barns cows walk to the milking parlour two to three times a day. (It takes only five minutes to milk a cow.)

causing cattle pain and discomfort. Straw, sawdust or sand bedding provides some comfort but not all farmers use bedding. Rubber mats are common because they take less time and money to manage.

As many as 25 per cent of dairy cows in B.C. cannot walk normally. On some farms it is over 50 per cent. The dairy industry is working with scientists to try to find ways to prevent lameness and treat lame cows so they experience less pain. While a dairy cow can live more than

20 years, their average lifespan on a dairy farm is only five to seven years. This is because as they age they produce less milk and they have more health issues, such as lameness. Older and lame cows are sold for meat.

A tale of flies and horns

For years, many farmers thought cutting off the tails of their cows would keep the cow's udders cleaner. Recent research shows "tail docking" doesn't help at all. Dairy farmers have now stopped docking cow tails.

Cows are now free to swat away at flies!

Naturally all dairy calves would grow up to have horns. To prevent injury to other cows and people, farmers remove them. Science has shown that this is extremely painful for calves. Now all dairy farmers must use pain medication before removing horns to relieve the calf's suffering.

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JO-ANNE MCARTHUR / WE ANIMALS



JO-ANNE MCARTHUR / WE ANIMALS



From left to right: The mother cow licks her newborn calf; Calves are removed from their mothers after about 24 hours; On some veal farms calves are chained to their pens.

Where do the calves go?

Dairy cows have a calf about once a year. Most female calves are kept to replace older milk cows. The rest of the females and all the males are sold for meat production. They might be raised and slaughtered at a younger age for veal (meat from young calves), or they might be raised along with beef cattle for beef.

Very young calves are fed a diet of cow's milk or a milk replacer. After a few months, grain and silage (moist fermented corn or grass) is added to their diet primarily so the calves get fat as quickly as possible. Veal calves are sent to slaughter when they are about five months old, whereas beef cattle are slaughtered at about a year and half.

Most veal calves are kept in small, individual pens or crates about as wide as a school desk (less than a metre). Calves can only lie down and get up but they cannot play, explore or even turn in a circle.

Farmers confine calves to make it easier to feed and clean, and so their muscles stay weak, which makes the meat more tender. On some veal farms (thankfully rare in B.C.) calves are even chained to their crates. Crated veal calves suffer extreme boredom and frustration. Bored calves will often over-groom themselves, licking their skin raw, for example.

Under the BC SPCA's SPCA Certified program, veal crates aren't allowed. Calves may be housed in individual pens and hutches up to three months of age, providing they are not tethered. They must have enough room to turn around, lie down, stretch out when lying down and groom themselves. Calves must also be able to see, smell and hear other calves. After they are weaned from milk, all calves must be group-housed and have access to pasture in appropriate seasons, weather permitting.



From left to right: Farmer removing a calf's horns; A tail that has been docked; Cows in tie-stall pens.

Dairy cows are all females

To produce milk a cow must have a calf. Beef calves stay with their mothers and nurse for several months before naturally switching to grass. This is called weaning. Dairy calves are removed from their mothers usually within 24 hours of birth. Separation is a very stressful time for both the cow and her calf. The longer farmers keep calves together the more stressful the separation. However, it is vitally important the calf nurse for the first six to eight feedings to absorb special nutrients in the mother's milk.

Most female calves are kept to replace older milking cows in the herd. The others, and all the male calves, are sold to beef or veal farms after the calves are about seven to 10 days old (see *Where do the calves go?*).

Barn life

There are two main types of housing systems for dairy cows – either *free-stall* pens or older-style *tie-stalls*. In tie-stall barns each cow is tethered in her pen. She eats, sleeps and is milked all while being tied to her stall. Cows can't groom properly and have limited social contact with other cows. They never get to go

outside or even leave their pen. B.C. farms don't use the tie-stall system.

In free-stall barns cows eat in individual stalls but rest in a group area where they can walk, socialize and go into bedded stalls to rest. Two to three times a day cows move through the milking parlour. Most cows still don't get to go outside. Generally, cows spend eight hours a day eating, eight hours resting and chewing their cud (re-eating partially digested food), and eight hours sleeping.

A newer type of system called a *bedded pack* is beginning to catch on. In these barns, there are no stalls at all – just very deep bedding for the cows to stand and lie on comfortably. It's a little like a large indoor field, which helps keep cows off of concrete. In-barn life is better but most cows still don't get to graze on grassland.

A better life for cows – SPCA Certified

The best operations, such as SPCA Certified farms, meet standards that require that cows get to roam and forage outside on pasture (weather permitting). Grazing on grassland is a strong desire of cattle. If pasture



Frolicking cows

Want to see how much dairy cows love to be outside on grass? Watch the reaction of the cows from Little Qualicum Cheeseworks when they finally get to go outside after a winter stuck in the barn. Go to spcacertified.ca/littlequalicum.

is not an option year-round, they must at least have a large exercise area close to the barn or bedded pack when inside. This has proven to help reduce lameness and allows the cows to lie down and interact more naturally. Right now the only SPCA Certified dairy farm is Little Qualicum Cheeseworks in Parksville on Vancouver Island.

After reading this, what system do you think is better from a cow's point of view – tie-stall, free-stall, bedded pack or pasture systems?



Like dogs, pigs are very social and love to play, run around and explore. On an SPCA Certified farm, that's exactly what they get to do!



Meeting a pig's needs:

SPCA CERTIFIED PIG FARMS

October is **Farm Animal Month** at the BC SPCA. It's a time to think about how we treat farm animals and how we might improve their lives. Let's take a look at pigs.

Close your eyes and imagine what farm life is like for the pigs we raise for food. Do you picture pigs outside?

Do you imagine them wallowing in a pond or out in a field? Do you see mother pigs (sows) lying on a bed of straw, nursing their piglets?

Sadly, almost all of the 27 million pigs raised in Canada can't do any of these things. That is, unless they are pigs raised on **SPCA Certified farms**.

On a regular, industrial pig farm – where most

On an SPCA Certified farm, piglets are able to nurse and sleep close to their mothers in their nest.





Exploring the outdoors

pigs live – pigs are raised inside barns. They never walk on grass, smell fresh air or feel the sun on their backs.



Zzzzz... nap-time

Pregnant sows are mostly kept in crates, called gestation stalls, their whole lives. They can't turn around, much less walk anywhere. Their stalls are too narrow and short.

When nearing the time to give birth, a sow naturally wants to make a nest for her piglets. But on regular pig farms, sows can only scratch at a barren floor. There is no bedding material. The mother and piglets lie on cold, slatted floors.

By contrast, on SPCA Certified pig farms, sows are given the freedom to make nests. They can also rest on soft straw or wood shavings. Sows are never kept in crates at all. They are free to wander around a large pen with other sows.



Lunch is served!

SPACE AND COMFORT

Growing pigs on a regular pig farm start out with lots of room. As they grow, they fill the space. Soon they get so big there is barely any space to move around. The floor is concrete with slats for urine and droppings to fall through. There is no place to explore or bedding to dig. Some farmers might give them a ball or an old tire to play with, but that's all.

On SPCA Certified farms, pigs spend time outside or inside the barn with space to move around and bedding to rest on. They enjoy running, playing and foraging for food, digging with their powerful noses.

When you know that pigs are as clever and social as dogs, then how you raise them matters even more. SPCA Certified farmers raise their animals in ways where they don't suffer from discomfort, boredom and frustration. To see more pictures of SPCA Certified farms, visit spcacertified.ca.



"Move over!"
"I can't..."

By contrast, there is no room to move in this farrowing crate on a regular farm.



Can you think of ways to improve the lives of farm animals? Send us your ideas and you could win one of three SPCA Certified hats plus some other SPCA Certified goodies. You must be 13 or under to enter.



Send your ideas to: Bark! Farm Animal Month, 1245 East 7th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5T 1R1 or email to kids@spca.bc.ca. Contest ends October 31, 2015.

