



Facts & Figures About Canadian Hens & Eggs

In General:

- In Canada, a total of 26 million hens produce more than 600 million dozen eggs per year - or about 7.2 billion eggs. Ontario accounts for 40% of Canada's total egg production.
- The average Canadian farm is family-owned and run and has 20,000 hens.
- The average laying hen can lay approximately 320 eggs in one year.
- Canadian egg farms provide a steady supply of safe, high-quality eggs at a fair price. This is accomplished through efficient management and production of eggs, research, product promotion and marketing activities.
- In Canada no chickens are ever given hormones, regardless of the type of farm they live on.
- Canadians eat about 19.4 dozen (or 233) eggs per year.



You were asking about...Eggs

Housing: Where do laying hens live?

There are many ways that hens are housed. Housing hens inside barns helps to protect the birds from disease and predators, as well as the variable weather of Canada. The type of barn a farmer has depends on many factors including bird health and well-being, farm employee work environments, economics and market demand.

Enriched colony housing is becoming more popular on Canadian egg farms. Enriched colony housing has hens living together in small social groups, giving birds more room to move around, stretch, spread their wings and express natural behaviours. These include perching, scratching and laying their eggs in a private nesting area. Housing birds in smaller social groups also helps to reduce aggressive behaviours from the more dominant hens.

In **free run** barns, hens have access to the whole barn floor but do not go outside. The hens are able to scratch, walk freely and lay their eggs in nesting boxes.

In **free range** barns, hens have access to the whole barn floor or roam outside when weather permits.

In **aviary** barns, hens have access to the whole barn floor as well as different levels of the barn where they can perch, feed, drink and lay their eggs.

In **conventional** barns, hens are kept in small groups. This system allows hens to have equal access to fresh food and water and prevents problems from more dominant, aggressive hens. This type of housing is being phased-out by Canadian eggs farmers.

Regardless of the housing type, farmers make sure their hens always receive the best care. Farmers constantly monitor the barn environment, and will check several times a day to make sure the equipment in their barns is working properly to control the temperature, humidity, light and ventilation at optimum levels for their birds. Many newer barns have computerized sensors that can send a message to the farmer's cell phone to alert them of any changes.

Nutrition: What do laying hens eat?

Hens are naturally omnivores. Farmers work closely with nutritionists and feed specialists to provide all of the essential nutrients for growth and good health.

Hens eat different quantities and types of food depending on their age. Feed rations are adjusted several times according to the age of the flock and the number of eggs they are laying. When birds first arrive on the farm as 18 week old pullets (young hens that haven't started laying eggs), they're fed a diet rich in protein (as much as 18 percent protein). As the birds grow, the protein level in the diet is reduced. As they begin to lay eggs, dietary protein levels are again increased and then decreased over time. The diet contains plenty of grains as well as vitamins and minerals. In fact, the feed hens eat can be compared to the cereal we eat for breakfast.

They also have constant access to food and water through automatic feed and water lines in their barns.

No egg-producing hens are ever fed hormones. On the rare occasion that hens need to be treated for an illness or disease, antibiotics are prescribed under the guidance of a veterinarian and the eggs are disposed of.

Natural supplements can be added to the feed and may include extra calcium to help the birds develop stronger bones and thicker egg shells.

Egg yolk colour can range from pale yellow to deep orange. It does not affect the flavor, nutrient value or quality of the egg. Wheat-based feeds tend to produce a paler yolk colour, while corn-based feeds produce a darker yolk colour.

About the life cycle of laying hens

Chickens that are raised for egg production will travel through four specialized stages: breeder farms, hatcheries, pullet farms and layer farms.

Breeder farms

Certain breeds of chickens are selected for the characteristics that are favourable for egg production. Hens are kept with roosters to naturally fertilize the eggs. The fertilized eggs are collected, cleaned and carefully stored, before being sent to a hatchery.

Hatcheries

Trays of fertilized eggs are placed in incubation cabinets called "settles" where, for the first 18 days, the eggs are turned frequently by the automatic tilting of the egg trays. This prevents the embryos from sticking to the inside of the shells. Three days before the chicks are due to hatch, the eggs are moved to hatching trays and placed in hatching cabinets where the temperature, humidity and ventilation are strictly controlled. The chicks hatch 21 days after being placed in the incubator.

Once hatched, the female chicks are vaccinated to protect them against common and serious poultry diseases. They may also have the sharp tips of their upper beaks trimmed at this time to prevent aggressive birds from hurting other birds. They are then sent to pullet farms.

Pullet farms

At the pullet farm, the birds are given nutritionally balanced feed rations, supplemental heating, timed lighting and special care as they mature. It takes the pullets 18 to 20 weeks to mature into laying hens. Most layer farms will get pullets from designated pullet farms, but some raise their own pullets.

Most pullet farms use an "all-in, all-out" system. This means that all birds arrive together and move to the laying barn all together. This allows for the barn to be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between each flock.

Laying farms

At approximately 19 weeks of age, pullets are moved to laying barns. The birds are now called hens or layers and will begin laying eggs between 18 to 20 weeks of age. In a typical flock, egg laying increases until the age of 26 to 28 weeks when more than 90 percent of hens are laying one egg a day. Their rate of laying eggs will then decline over the next 40 weeks. Hens will then lay eggs for 52 to 60 weeks.

As with the pullet farms, once the birds have left, the barn will be completely cleaned and disinfected before a new flock moves in.





Caring for laying hens

Farmers, like any animal owners, want to provide the best care possible for their animals. Canadian farmers have helped to develop "Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals," in co-operation with animal scientists, government and many other partners. The codes spell out what's appropriate in the daily care processes that occur on the farm, from basic needs such as shelter, housing, feed and water to operational procedures like breeding and transportation.

In addition to the Code, egg farmers also follow national animal care and food safety programs.

Egg farmers work hard caring for their hens every day of the year, while supplying consumers with safe and nutritious eggs. They work with hens because they enjoy them and want only the best for their birds. Humane treatment of hens is a priority - and the law. Farmers make sure hens have adequate light and air, a well-balanced, nutritious diet, fresh water and clean surroundings.

Breeds

Chickens raised for egg production are of different breeds than those raised for meat.

There are two main breeds of laying hens in Canada - White Leghorn and Rhode Island Red.

White Leghorns are the most common type of laying hens in Canada. There are many breeds of White Leghorns including Shaver, Lohman and Babcock breeds. They have white feathers and lay white eggs.

Rhode Island Red is an old pure-line breed of hens. Many breeders have used genes from the Rhode Island Red to breed the brown-feathered hens that are common today. They have brown feathers and lay brown eggs.

Off to market

Eggs are collected and stored in a cooler on the farm until they are picked up - usually once or twice a week - by a refrigerated truck. The truck then takes them to a licensed grading station.

Once at the grading station, eggs are washed and sanitized by a high-speed washer that gently scrubs the eggs. They are then examined for quality through a process called candling. A trained operator scans the eggs as they pass over a strong beam of light, which shows the contents of the egg and the quality of the egg shell.

The eggs are then divided into grades A, B, or C. Grade A eggs are the ones sold in grocery stores. They have round, well-centered yolks, and clean uncracked shells. Eggs are then weighed and separated into peewee, small, medium, large, jumbo or double yolk sizes.

Once eggs have been graded, they will be delivered to stores for consumers to purchase. It takes four to seven days for the eggs to travel from the farm to the store.



EGG TRIVIA

Did You Know...

- A laying hen can lay about 320 eggs in a year.
- There is no nutritional difference between brown and white eggs.
- As hens age the size of their egg increases too.
- Eggs are graded according to weight and not circumference.

Egg dictionary

- **Aviary:** Barns where hens have several levels where they perch, feed, drink and lay eggs in a nesting box. They are also free to fly down to floor level to scratch.
- **Biosecurity:** Practices or procedures set up to protect flocks of hens from disease. These can include locking the barn, preventing entry of wild animals or birds or changing clothes and boots when entering the barn.
- **Chick:** A newly hatched young chicken.
- **Candling:** A process that allows the grader to see the condition of the shell, if there are any cracks, the size of the air cell and whether the yolk is well-centred. This used to involve holding eggs over light produced by a candle, but now eggs are passed over a strong light to make the interior of the egg visible.
- **Conventional hen housing:** A housing system where the hens live in small social groups. This allows all hens to have equal access to fresh food and water.
- **Drinkers:** Automatic water lines in barns for poultry to drink from.
- **Enriched colony housing:** A type of housing system used on a growing number of Canadian egg farms. The units are furnished with perches, a curtained nesting area and sometimes a scratch area.
- **Feeders:** Automatic machines which dispense chicken feed (birds are given 24-hour access to feed).
- **Free run:** Hens have access to the whole barn floor.
- **Free range:** Hens have access to the whole barn floor or roam outside when the weather permits.
- **Fowl:** A bird of any kind. In the egg industry, “spent fowl” refers to hens that have finished laying eggs.
- **Flock:** A group of birds. In the egg sector, a flock is a group of hens.
- **Grading:** At the grading station eggs are washed, candled and divided into three grades. Canada Grade A eggs are sold in retail stores for household use and placed in cartons, based on their weight (not their circumference).
- **Layer farm:** Where laying hens are housed. Hens lay eggs for 52 to 60 weeks. During this time they can lay more than 300 eggs.
- **Laying hen:** A female chicken that lays eggs. On average, hens start laying eggs at 18 to 20 weeks of age.
- **Pullet farm:** Where young birds are raised from day old chicks to 18-20 weeks of age when they will be transported to a layer farm.
- **Pullet:** A female chicken or young hen.
- **Rooster:** A male chicken.
- **Supply Management:** The system under which the Canadian egg industry runs. Supply management balances supply with demand and prevents overproduction, flooded markets and depressed prices for farmers. It allows for a stable and predictable market for farmers, while ensuring a constant supply of eggs at a reasonable price for consumers.



About eggs – additional website links

Egg Farmers of Canada – www.eggfarmers.ca

BC Egg Marketing Board – www.bcegg.com

Egg Farmers of Alberta – www.eggs.ab.ca

Saskatchewan Egg Producers – www.saskegg.ca

Manitoba Egg Farmers – www.eggs.mb.ca

Egg Farmers of Ontario – www.getcracking.ca

Fédération des producteurs d'œufs du Québec – www.oef.ca

Egg Farmers of New Brunswick – www.nbegg.ca

Egg Farmers of Nova Scotia – www.nsegg.ca

Egg Farmers of Prince Edward Island – www.eggspei.ca

Egg Farmers of Newfoundland and Labrador – www.nleggs.ca

Northwest Territories Egg Producers – www.polaregg.ca

Coalition for Sustainable Egg Supply – www.sustainableeggcoalition.org



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