

## **Miracle of Birth Center**

### **Poultry Q & A**

#### **Q. What is this type of housing?**

A. This is a caged housing system, which is used by about 95% of the industry today. There are two conventional cages containing eight hens each and one "Enriched" cage with 32 hens. This represents a normal stocking density for laying hens. Other housing options include cage free aviaries and open range systems. Each system has pros and cons.

#### **Q. What are the different parts of the cage that we can see?**

A. The "Enriched" cage has a nest box and a scratch pad. It also has perches. Both cages have free-choice access to water and feed. Droppings fall through the flooring so as not to contaminate the eggs and to keep the birds clean.

#### **Q. What breed are these chickens?**

A. Hy-Line W36 in the conventional cages  
Lohman in the Enriched cage

#### **Q. How old are chickens when they start to lay eggs?**

A. Chickens start laying eggs around 18-22 weeks of age.  
These chickens are 33 weeks of age and have already been laying for 15 weeks.

#### **Q. How many eggs does a chicken lay every year?**

A. Young chickens lay 250-280 eggs per year. On average a hen will lay an egg every 25-26 hours. 90% of the eggs are laid in the morning. They need 8 hours of darkness and 16 hours of light each day.

#### **Q. How old can a chicken be to still lay eggs?**

A. A healthy hen can lay eggs for 10-12 years but slow down as they age.  
Most modern farms have their birds lay eggs for about 80-90 weeks at which time they will be replaced with younger birds.

#### **Q. What is molting?**

A. Molting is the natural process when a chicken loses its feathers and re-grows new ones. It happens about once a year and lasts for 14-16 weeks. Egg production slows during molting.

#### **Q. Do you need a rooster for a hen to lay eggs?**

A. A hen does not need a rooster to lay an egg but most layers need an average of 14 hours of light per day to lay eggs.

#### **Q. What is "hormone free" chicken?**

A. All living organisms have hormones to regulate body functions, however no additional hormones are allowed in raising market hogs or poultry.

#### **Q. Are brown eggs more nutritious than white eggs?**

A. Eggshell color does not affect the nutritional value of an egg.

#### **Q. How long will eggs stay fresh?**

A. Refrigerated eggs will stay fresh for 5 weeks but will stay fresh up to 2 months if kept in an airtight container.

**Q. How can you tell if an egg is fresh?**

A. Fresh eggs sink in water while old eggs float. Always store eggs with pointed end down in the original carton as eggs are porous and can absorb other smells.

**Q. What is the nutrient value of one egg?**

A. 1 large egg provides 75 calories and all necessary nutrients needed except Vitamin C.

**Q. What is the incubation time for a fertilized chicken egg?**

A. The incubation time for a chicken egg is 21 days.

**Q. What is candling eggs?**

A. Candling is the process of shining a bright light through the egg in order to identify any imperfections in the egg like a cracked shell.

**Q. How much feed will a laying hen eat?**

A. ¼ lb./bird/day of a balanced ration that is high in calcium.

**FREE RANGE VS. ENVIRONMENTALLY CONTROLLED CAGES**

The move from raising laying hens under free range conditions to environmentally controlled cages has taken place over the years to improve the health and well-being of the birds.

1. Death loss has been reduced from 40% in free range conditions to 5% when in well-managed, environmentally controlled cage systems.
2. Egg production has improved from 140 eggs per hen per year to 240-300 eggs per hen per year.
3. Chickens are healthier in modern production systems and therefore require less need for antibiotic or anti-parasitic treatments.
4. Chickens are less stressed when kept in small groups of 4-8 birds because they do not have to re-establish a "pecking order" like they do in big groups.
5. The move to environmentally controlled caged housing has provided the consumer with a cleaner, safer and healthier product than ever before—the incredible edible egg.

**Why do environmentally controlled cages provide a better life for chickens?**

1. An environmentally controlled barn protects the birds from the ravages of extreme weather changes.
2. Modern chicken barns protect the birds from predators.
3. The birds and the eggs are cleaner in modern facilities.
  - a. Manure is carried away immediately with a moving belt beneath the cage so air quality is improved and there is less chance for fecal contamination.
  - b. Once an egg is laid it rolls gently to another conveyor belt and is transported safely to be cleaned and processed, giving consumers a fresher, more wholesome product.
4. Modern barns allow all birds to consume a high quality ration specially designed for their needs consisting of corn, soybean meal, vitamins, and minerals.

5. Modern barns allow a farmer or manager to walk through the barn and see each bird at a glance to make sure all is well.

6. Birds that are more comfortable, cleaner, and less stressed are healthier and happier birds, which is the goal of all farmers.

There are now 300 million laying hens in the United States, which produce 75 billion eggs per year—about 10% of the world's supply.

## **CHS MIRACLE OF BIRTH HEN HOUSE**

### **POULTRY MESSAGE POINTS**

The underlying goal of the CHS Miracle of Birth Center is to share the miracles of birth that happen every day on modern livestock farms. We want to demonstrate to the public how veterinarians and farmers have dedicated their professional careers to keeping their animals clean, comfortable and healthy. Modern housing systems have been designed to improve animal welfare!

The miracle at the hen house is how these laying hens can transform ¼ pound of high-quality feed into a new egg every 24-26 hours.

There are several different types of housing for laying hens: conventional cages, enriched cages, cage-free, free range, and back yard. With all of the consumer interest in how birds are housed, we feel it is important that the consumer is well informed.

Farmers originally moved their birds into clean, climate-controlled housing to improve animal welfare and production. Caged housing prevents the birds from coming in contact with manure; it prevents the eggs from coming in contact with manure; and it minimizes the social stress associated with establishing and maintaining a stable “pecking order.”

Conventional 2' X 2' cages that hold eight hens may appear crowded (minimum of 67 sq. inches/bird) but if you measure animal welfare by death loss, injury, social stress and productivity, the conventional caged housing system offers the highest degree of welfare to the birds and the most efficient system of production.

Enriched cages offer more space to the hens (minimum of 116 sq. inches/bird), perches, a nesting box and scratch pad, but surprisingly, performance is still better in conventional cages—mostly due to reduced pecking order stress.

Although lower cost of production is not a valid explanation to those who believe welfare improves in cage-free systems, consumers must be aware of the increased costs that must be passed on to the consumer. Retail prices varied from \$0.98 per dozen to \$4.98 per dozen in Minnesota in 2016. Average price is much higher in California where hen housing is mandated by law.

Additional important information with comparisons of the different housing systems is available on the posters next to the hens and on the Poultry Q&A. Additional signs that identify conventional vs. enriched cages will be above the display in 2017.

All poultry industry volunteers should familiarize themselves with these message points, check in at the MOBC office, and wear a name tag that clearly identifies them as a volunteer. Thanks to all for helping to make the Hen House such a successful addition to the CHS Miracle of Birth Center.