

Fact Sheet: Battery Cages

Version 2, updated February 12, 2009

<http://www.animalvisuals.org/empathy/virtualbattery cage>

Facts

- In the United States, an estimated 95% of egg-laying hens are intensively confined in battery cages.¹
- As of December 2008, about 300 million birds are confined in battery cages, almost one for every U.S. citizen.²
- Each cage confines 5 or 6 birds on average, but sometimes up to 10 birds.³
- Voluntary industry guidelines specify a minimum of 67 square inches per hen.⁴ This is an area smaller than a standard sheet of paper.
- Like any animal, chickens are highly motivated to perform natural behaviors. These behaviors include nesting, perching, scratching, foraging, dust-bathing, exploring, and stretching. Caged chickens are denied all of these natural behaviors, causing them severe frustration.⁵
- Battery hens suffer from serious health problems, such as respiratory disease from constant exposure to ammonia fumes and fecal dust; osteoporosis, bone fractures, and prolapsed uteruses from being bred to lay eggs at an unnaturally high rate; and foot disorders, sores, and injuries from contact with the cage wire in outdated cage systems.⁶
- As a response to the lack of foraging opportunities in the barren cage environment, chickens sometimes engage in feather-pecking of their cagemates. So, before they are 10 days old, the ends of their beaks are seared off with hot blades.⁷
- Beak mutilation causes acute and sometimes chronic pain.⁸
- For every egg you buy, a hen will be forced to endure these conditions for over 32 hours.⁹
- Chickens are confined for about a year and a half before their ability to lay eggs declines, then they are killed.¹⁰
- Eggs are not a necessary part of a nutritious diet, and there are many healthy, affordable alternatives that make it easy to leave eggs off of your shopping list for good. Some good egg alternatives include applesauce, bananas, commercial egg replacer powder (such as Ener-G Egg Replacer or Bob's Red Mill All Natural Egg Replacer) ground flaxseed, tofu, or vinegar and baking soda.¹¹
- The egg industry cannot be trusted to make responsible decisions regarding the welfare of chickens, because it has a profit motive to sacrifice their interests. There are currently no U.S. federal laws that protect the interests of chickens used for food.¹²

Notes

1. Reference 1, page 1, paragraph 6.
2. Reference 2, page 1.
3. Reference 3, page 22: The average number of chickens per cage is about 5.6. Reference 5, under "Cages and Alternative Systems," it states that the most commonly used cages hold 5-10 birds per cage. Reference 4, Notes from Wednesday, November 30, 2005 at Ebenshade Farms in Pennsylvania, investigator noted that most of the birds were overcrowded in cages, with as many as 10 birds per cage.
4. Reference 1, page 11, paragraph 1.
5. Reference 5 provides a summary of natural chicken behavior and how it is frustrated by battery cage confinement.

6. Reference 5 provides a summary of diseases and health problems battery chickens suffer, and reference 6 provides more detail on osteoporosis and cloacal prolapse resulting from selective breeding.
7. Reference 1, page 4: Guidelines for beak trimming.
8. Reference 5, page 5: “Abnormal Behavior: Cannibalism and Feather-Pecking.”
9. Reference 2, page 1: Egg production for October 2008 was 2,276 eggs per 100 layers. This is 22.76 eggs per month per bird, which translates to 32.68 hours per egg, given that October has 31 days.
10. Reference 3, page 23: The average age of laying hens entering battery cages is 17.5 weeks. Page 29: The average age of laying hens at slaughter is 101.5 weeks. $101.5 - 17.5 = 84$ weeks, or about 19 months.
11. For more information about how easy it is to replace eggs, see the following links:
 - a. http://www.hsus.org/farm/resources/pubs/egg_alternatives.html
 - b. <http://www.eggindustry.com/cfi/action/?v=eggfree>
 - c. <http://vegetarian.about.com/od/vegetarianvegan101/f/eggsubstitute.htm>
 - d. http://www.pcrm.org/health/veginfo/vsk/without_eggs.html
12. Reference 7, Section 2132, part g: In the Animal Welfare Act, the word "animal" excludes poultry.

References

1. United Egg Producers. (2008 Edition, published 2003). *United Egg Producers Animal Husbandry Guidelines For U.S. Egg Laying Flocks*, Retrieved November 15, 2008 from <http://www.uepcertified.com/media/pdf/UEP-Animal-Welfare-Guidelines.pdf>.
2. USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service. (2008). *Chickens and Eggs*. Retrieved December 16, 2008 from <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/nass/ChicEggs//2000s/2008/ChicEggs-11-21-2008.pdf>.
3. USDA/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services. National Animal Health Monitoring System. (2000). *Layers '99. Part II: Reference of 1999 Table Egg Layer Management in the U.S.* Retrieved December 16, 2008 from <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/vs/ceah/ncahs/nahms/poultry/layers99/lay99pt2.pdf>.
4. Compassion Over Killing. (2005). *New COK Investigation Leads to Criminal Charges of Animal Cruelty: Excerpts from the Investigator's Log Notes*. Retrieved December 18, 2008, from http://www.cok.net/feat/paefi_notes.php.
5. Shields, Sara, and Ian J.H. Duncan. (2006). *An HSUS Report: A Comparison of the Welfare of Hens in Battery Cages and Alternative Systems*. Retrieved December 18, 2008 from <http://www.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/farm/hsus-a-comparison-of-the-welfare-of-hens-in-battery-cages-and-alternative-systems.pdf>.
6. The Humane Society of the United States. (2008). *An HSUS Report: Welfare Issues with Selective Breeding of Egg-Laying Hens for Productivity*. Retrieved December 19, 2008 from http://www.hsus.org/web-files/PDF/farm/welfiss_breeding_egg.pdf.
7. USDA/Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. (2007). *Animal Welfare Act*. Retrieved January 29, 2009 from http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/awa.shtml.