

The Nutritional Benefits of Pasture-Raised Laying Hens

Happy Chick Farms

Birds on pasture = better eggs

Most laying hens that are raised for eggs are kept inside in cages and eat a diet consisting primarily of grain. Birds raised outdoors on pasture eat plants, insects, and small animals, in addition to being fed grit and grain. They are exposed to sunshine and are able to forage, run and peck. This results in healthier animals ... and more nutritious food for people as well.



Studies show the nutritional value of eggs from pastured hens that consume grass and forage is higher than eggs from conventionally-raised hens.

Better Fat Quality

Less saturated fat, more heart-healthy polyunsaturated fats

- ▶ Replacing saturated fats with polyunsaturated fats is associated with reduced blood levels of total and LDL cholesterol.
- ▶ Studies suggest that replacement reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease, including heart attacks, and related deaths.

Increase in Vitamins

Lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 polyunsaturated fats

- ▶ Omega-6 fats are considered more inflammatory than omega-3 fats.
- ▶ Research suggests a lower ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fats may improve cognitive function and reduce the risk of many chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Higher levels of vitamin D₃, vitamin E and β-carotene

- ▶ Vitamin D₃ helps to protect against osteoporosis and heart disease.
- ▶ Vitamin E and β-carotene are antioxidants that protect cells from damage due to free radicals. β-carotene is critical for vision health.

By the numbers...

Compared to conventionally-raised eggs, pasture-raised eggs have:

**2.7x more
omega-3
fats**

**75% lower
omega-6:
omega-3
ratio**

**1.5x
higher poly-
unsaturated:
saturated
fats**

**4x more
vitamin D₃**

**1.7x more
vitamin E**

**3.8x more
β-carotene**

The how & why

Forages are the edible parts of plants other than grain and include pasture vegetation and grasses. They are good sources of beneficial omega-3 fats.

In contrast, grains such as corn are dominated by more inflammatory omega-6 fats. Due to the way laying hens digest their food, the beneficial fat and nutrients in the pasture are absorbed relatively unchanged before they are incorporated into their eggs. When it comes to eggs, **“you are what you eat!”**

In addition, laying hens that live most or all of their lives outside on pasture are exposed to natural sunlight, resulting in higher vitamin D₃ content in their eggs.



Shopping for eggs

“Cage-free” means laying hens were not kept in cages. There is no legal definition of this term under the FDA, but the claim is verified if the egg carton has a USDA Grade shield. It does not mean that the hens had any outdoor access.

“Free-range” implies that the birds were raised outdoors. However, under USDA labeling laws, animals only have to be allowed access to outdoors with no provision for how much time or space must be provided outside. This may mean access only through a ‘pop hole’ with no full-body entry to the outdoors.

“Pasture-raised” suggests pasture was included in the bird’s diet. However, there is no standard diet requirement and no definition of pasture under this claim.

Because these claims are not 100% reliable, look for third party verified labels, or a local farm that uses humane practices but may not be certified due to cost. Learn more at: foodanimalconcernstrust.org/food-labels



The Bottom Line

Pasture-raised animals produce nutritionally superior food for people. In addition to the nutritional advantages, there are many animal welfare and environmental benefits associated with pasture-based animal agriculture. Please consider supporting your local family farmers who raise their animals humanely on grass and well-managed pasture.



Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT) is a national nonprofit organization that promotes the safe and humane production of meat, milk, and eggs. FACT offers grants, scholarships, webinars and a mentorship program for livestock and poultry farmers who wish to raise their animals on pasture.

www.FoodAnimalConcernsTrust.org