

PATHWAYS

MIND • BODY • SPIRIT • ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES
IN THE WASHINGTON DC METRO AREA

NOW IN OUR 34th YEAR
WINTER 2010-11 • FREE

CULTIVATING COMPASSION

EDITED BY CAM MACQUEEN

The Egg Recall: Unscrambling the Truth & Cracking the Habit

BY ERICA MEIER

In the wake of the largest egg recall in our nation's history—more than 550 million eggs were recalled this summer due to a Salmonella risk, followed by an additional 300,000 eggs in November—consumers and government agencies alike are scrambling for answers: how did this happen, who is to blame, and how can we protect ourselves from falling ill? While the egg industry is scrambling the facts in a desperate attempt to keep its reputation from cracking, the hard-boiled truth is that all of the recalled eggs share a common denominator: they all came from hens confined inside an archaic and cruel battery cage system of production—a system that is putting consumers at risk while also causing tremendous animal suffering.

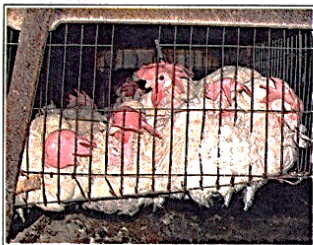
The Hard-Boiled Truth

When most people think about where eggs come from, they're likely to conjure up idyllic images of Old MacDonald's Farm with happy hens roaming freely outdoors on lush green pastures. The dismal reality, however, is that behind nearly every "incredible, edible egg" sold in grocery stores

today is a hen confined inside a barren wire battery cage so restrictive she can barely even move. She's denied the opportunity to engage in many important natural behaviors, including nesting, dust-bathing, and even walking. Instead, she is treated

like a mere egg-producing machine. After her exhausted body becomes too battered and weak to continue laying a profitable number of eggs, she'll finally be plucked from her cage—and her first breath of fresh air will be on her way to her death.

Such misery is the reality of life for over 250 million egg-laying hens in the U.S. each year, representing about 95% of the egg industry. A typical battery cage facility consists of multiple windowless sheds that run the length of a football field, each one warehousing tens of thousands of hens. Inside, row upon row of cages are often stacked four levels high with up to eight birds stuffed in a single cage. Each hen is generally afforded a meager 67 square



inches of living space—that's less space than the size of a sheet of notebook paper.

Undercover investigations inside egg factories—from Maryland to Ohio to Minnesota to Iowa to New York and California—confirm that animal cruelty

is standard business in this industry. Hidden cameras have repeatedly documented overcrowding, severe feather loss, untreated illness and injuries, birds immobilized in the wires of their cages, and dead birds left in cages with live hens (visit EggIndustry.com to see for yourself). What the images are unable to capture, however, is the stench of thousands of pounds of excrement collecting in the manure pits below the cages—a stench the birds cannot escape.

Egg-laying hens are subjected to some of the worst abuses imaginable. They are arguably the most intensively confined animals in agribusiness today. With virtually no laws protecting them, these birds can be—and rou-

tinely are—treated in ways that would result in criminal prosecution if those same abuses were inflicted upon cats or dogs.

Numerous experts agree that battery cage confinement contributes to a number of welfare problems for laying hens. Reports also show that eggs from battery-caged hens and their eggs have a higher risk of being infected with Salmonella. In fact, according to a recent article in *World Poultry*, an industry trade publication, "the majority of studies indicate that a cage housing system has an increased risk of being Salmonella-positive in comparison to non-cage housing systems."

Such concerns have already prompted several countries in Europe to ban the use of barren wire battery cages, and they'll be phased out of the entire European Union by 2012. In the U.S., however, there are no federal laws in the U.S. governing the care of animals raised for food while they are on the farm, though two states have responded to growing consumer concerns: California and Michigan are both phasing out cages for egg production.

While polls show that the overwhelming majority of Americans are

continued on page 36

The Egg Recall: Unscrambling the Truth & Cracking the Habit

...continued from page 35

opposed to the use of battery cages, consumers are often unaware that most eggs in stores are actually from caged hens. The industry prefers it that way and takes advantage of the lack of federal regulations overseeing the use of animal-welfare claims on cartons, rendering the labeling landscape virtually meaningless. Without any federal oversight, claims on egg cartons can—

also deceiving consumers about that abuse.

The Sunny Side

As the painful reality of egg production increasingly gains the public's attention, a growing number of people are choosing to express their compassion for animals by removing their support from this cruel industry. Indeed, the most important step each of us can

Without any federal oversight, claims on egg cartons can—and commonly do—misrepresent to consumers how those eggs were produced.

and commonly do—misrepresent to consumers how those eggs were produced.

Walk into any grocery store today and you'll find cartons decorated with happy images of hens roaming around outside or marketing claims such as "naturally-raised" or "animal-friendly"—even when those eggs were laid by bird crammed inside tiny wire cages. In other words, not only is the egg industry cruelly confining hens in cages, it's

take to help end the suffering endured by laying hens is to simply leave their eggs out of our shopping carts.

With so many animal-friendly options available in grocery stores today, choosing delicious egg-free foods has never been easier. Prefer to cook at home? Here are some quick and egg-stremely easy recipes to get you started. For more egg-free recipes to help you crack the egg habit, visit VegRecipes.org.



Egg-Free Egg Nog

Serves 5

- 1 quart soymilk
- 6 ounces Mori-Nu silken tofu, extra firm
- 6 tablespoons maple syrup
- 1/4 cup Amaretto, Southern Comfort, brandy, or alcohol of choice (optional)
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon cardamom
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

In a blender, combine all of the ingredients and blend until creamy and smooth. Chill before serving.

Chewy Chocolate Chip Cookies

Makes 25 to 30 cookies

- 1 cup of softened soy margarine
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/4 cup soy milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla



- 2 1/4 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 12 ounces dairy-free chocolate chips

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, mix the margarine, sugar, and brown sugar until it's light and fluffy. Slowly stir in the soymilk then add the vanilla to make a creamy mixture. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, salt, and baking soda. Add this dry mixture to the creamy mixture and stir well. Then fold in the chocolate chips. Drop small spoonfuls onto non-stick cookie sheets and bake for 8 to 10 minutes.

Erica Meier is the executive director of Compassion Over Killing (COK), a non-profit animal charity based in Washington, D.C. Working to end animal abuse since 1995, COK exposes cruelty to animals raised for food and promotes vegetarian eating as a way to build a kinder, cleaner, and healthier world. On the web at COK.net. Erica can be reached at emeier@cok.net.