

## Manitoba egg farmers have responded to consumer demand by offering a choice of eggs from a variety of different housing systems

Humane animal care is dependent upon good management practices - not the housing system used.

Research into space requirements and housing alternatives is ongoing, and based on behavioural science - not emotion. Each year, Manitoba egg farmers contribute thousands of dollars towards poultry research into the health, care and housing of laying hens.

### Free-range

- Hens have access to the outdoors and outdoor vegetation; weather permitting
- Hens can nest, dust bathe and scratch

#### ▼ Free-range laying hen



In Manitoba, there are over 170 regulated egg and pullet farmers whose primary responsibility is the care and well-being of their laying hens. Farmers have responded to the demands of the marketplace by providing a variety of nutritionally enhanced eggs as well as offering a choice of eggs from different housing systems including free-run, free-range and conventional cages.

The most common breed of hen in Manitoba is the White Leghorn. The colour of the egg shell is determined by the breed of the hen; a white hen lays a white egg while a brown hen lays a brown egg.

*Photo on front cover - Larry & Karen Friesen, Egg Farmers, Niverville, Manitoba*



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## The Care of Laying Hens in Manitoba





**In Manitoba, hens are housed in a variety of different ways including free-run, free-range and conventional cages.**

Each of these production systems is referenced in Canada's *Recommended code of practice for the care and handling of pullets, layers and spent fowl* (Canadian Agri-food Research Council, 2003). The Code provides guidelines for space, water, feed, lighting, air circulation, handling etc., and is cited in the provincial Animal Care Act.

The Code of Practice is supported by science and was developed collaboratively with organizations including the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, as well as poultry scientists and farmers.



#### ▲ Laying hens in conventional cages

##### Conventional Cages

- Cages provide hens with ideal small group settings that give even the most docile hen access to feed and water
- Small group sizes may reduce pecking and other aggressive behaviours
- Recent research has shown caged hens have lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol than hens that live in alternative housing
- Farmers can easily monitor the health of individual hens as well as their water and feed intake
- Food safety is enhanced in cage systems because the hens and eggs are separated from manure
- Manure is regularly removed which contributes to improved air quality
- Cage systems have virtually eliminated the need for sub-therapeutic antibiotics
- Indoor housing provides a consistent environmental temperature and protects hens from the extremes of outdoor weather
- Indoor housing protects hens from predators and contact with wild birds that may carry diseases such as Avian Influenza
- Cages result in lower mortality for laying hens

According to Karen Schwean-Lardner, Poultry Science Researcher from the University of Saskatchewan, **“There isn't any one particular perfect housing system for laying hens.”** Each housing system has its advantages.



#### ▲ Free-run laying hens at feeder

##### Free-run

- Laying hens have free use of the barn floor
- Barns may be equipped with perches which can improve bone strength as well as foot and claw condition
- Hens can nest and scratch
- Indoor housing provides a consistent environmental temperature and protects hens from the extremes of outdoor weather
- Indoor housing protects hens from predators and contact with wild birds that may carry diseases such as Avian Influenza