



## THE HATCHERY

For all egg-laying hens, life begins at the hatchery. Eggs collected from the parent birds are stored, incubated and hatched over 31 days.

The male and female chicks are sorted onto separate conveyor belts. These days many chicks have been genetically modified to make the males a different colour than the females, allowing for quick sorting.

Layer-hen breeder flocks are kept in large barren sheds without access to the outdoors.

Chickens reach sexual maturity around 18-22 weeks and sheds usually house roughly 10 hens to every rooster.

Roosters in parent bird sheds can often be aggressive and fight over hens. Parent birds are kept until they are no longer considered economically viable. They are then killed.



## DEBEAKING

Feather pecking is an issue in all egg-laying housing systems, though is particularly widespread in cage-free and free-range systems where hens are housed with thousands of others.

In some cases, feather pecking can lead to cannibalism. To reduce peck injury mortality rates among flocks, the end of hens' beaks are painfully removed at the hatchery on their first day of life.

Beaks are removed using either an infrared laser or a hot blade. Both techniques are painful and can lead to complications including nerve damage and chronic pain. No state or territory law in Australia requires pain relief to be used in conjunction with this procedure.

Chicks are then stacked in trays and trucked to pullet rearing farms, where they'll remain for four months until they begin laying eggs.



## BARN

Hens housed in barn-laid systems are not confined to cages, however they live in barren, windowless sheds where they are never given access to the outside.

High stocking densities in these systems restrict hens' ability to move freely and exercise.

There are no legal requirements or standards which apply to cage-free or 'barn-laid' egg production systems.

Chickens have complex social structures and form 'pecking orders' among their flock. However, when housed with thousands of other birds, it is impossible for hens to establish these pecking orders, leading to stress and aggression.

## MACERATION

Unable to ever produce eggs themselves and a completely different breed to the chickens used for meat, the male chicks are considered waste products, as are any females perceived to be deformed or weak.

They are sorted onto a separate conveyor belt from the healthy females on their first day of life, and sent into an industrial blender called a macerator.

This practice is legal and referred to as humane by the RSPCA. Smaller hatcheries may use carbon dioxide gas or simply suffocate the chicks in plastic bags.

All commercial egg farms - caged, barn laid, free range, organic, RSPCA-approved - involve the killing of male chicks, a total of roughly 12 million per year in Australia.



## CAGED

Around a quarter of the 21 million layer hens in Australia are housed in battery cages. Each shed can contain up to 100,000 hens, with 4 - 20 per cage. Each hen is afforded a space smaller than a A4 sheet of paper.

Due to decades of genetic manipulation and selective breeding, they lay an egg almost every day for a total of up to 330 per year, compared to the 10-15 that a wild hen would lay.

As they age, the poor environment and physical stress of frequent egg-laying takes a toll on their health, indicated by the gradual loss of all of their feathers and an increasingly pale comb.

Deaths inside the cages are common, and due to the size of the facilities can be easily missed for long periods of time, forcing the surviving hens to live on top of the rotting carcasses.



## FREE-RANGE

Up until 2016, there were no national standards for 'free-range' eggs. Now, free-range farms are capped at a maximum outdoor density of 10,000 hens per hectare, though they still spend most of their time packed together in large sheds.

In these systems aggression is common, and disease can spread rapidly.

In 2024, 1.3 million chickens and ducks were culled due to an outbreak of avian flu in Victoria. More than half a million of the chickens killed came from a cage-free facility.

A 2025 investigation into free-range and cage-free egg farms in Victoria, showed hens suffering from serious injury and illness, and dead and dying birds left to rot.

Many of the larger free-range farms also have cage farms on the same property, with the eggs from both ending up in the same packing shed. A 2009 analysis indicated that as many as one in six eggs sold as 'free-range' were laid by caged or barn hens.





# DEPOPULATION

Hens taken to the slaughterhouse are first 'depopulated'; removed from sheds by workers and forced into small crates.

They are typically caught by hand by contract teams and jammed into plastic crates. The crates are then forklifted onto trucks for transport to the slaughterhouse.

Many suffer broken and fractured bones during this process, and it is not uncommon for their legs, wings or heads to get caught between the crates and the bars on the slaughter truck.

Photo: Animal Liberation

# SLAUGHTER

At some slaughterhouses, chickens are shackled upside-down on a moving line. They are lowered into a bath of electrified water to stun them prior to their throats being cut by an automated blade, or by a worker with a knife.

If they lift their heads, they can miss the stun bath, facing the blade fully conscious and ultimately drowning in scalding water further down the process.

Another common method of chicken slaughter is exposure to CO<sub>2</sub> gas, where they are suffocated in containers that are pumped with the gas. This method is used to kill 'spent' egg-laying hens and 'broiler' chickens.

Slaughtered layer hens largely end up in lower-grade chicken meat products such as mince, or rendered into poultry meal for use in pet food or farmed animal feed.

# TAKE ACTION

The commercial exploitation, confinement and slaughtering of hundreds of thousands of hens in the egg industry is completely unnecessary, especially given the vast array of plant-based alternatives.

With each plant-based choice you make, you're saving hens from a lifetime of suffering.



Scan the QR code to find out more about how you can stop hens from being exploited.

No egg is ethical.

[EggsExposed.com.au](http://EggsExposed.com.au)

# EGGS EXPOSED

THE TRUTH OF THE AUSTRALIAN EGG INDUSTRY



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