

A Violent Egg Industry

Matt Bear, **National Endowment for the Animals**

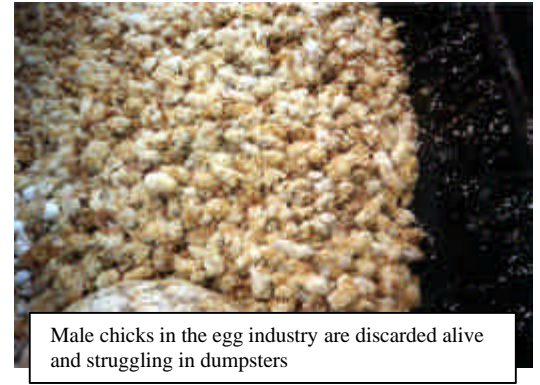
www.NEAforever.org

Printed in Elephant Magazine, Boulder, CO, May 2004

Thank you to the following for the valuable information.
Please visit these websites and offer your support:

[Compassion Over Killing](#)

[United Poultry Concerns](#)



Photos were not printed in Elephant Magazine, but appear here courtesy of:

[Farm Sanctuary](#)

“People are inherently bad,” my friend sighed, citing the nearly 10 billion farm animals we kill in the U.S. every year for our food desires. I had to disagree, “No, no – people are inherently good.” Oh, man, how was I going to win this argument? What started as the obligatory coffee house philosophical discussion, spiraled into a fairly deep discussion of marketing in America.

We’ve come to expect an ad on every bumper, billboard and behind in America. We know we’re being sold on everything from which cola is king to which soap will make us sing. Take a stroll down the wide aisles of any supermarket and marvel at the bright plastic packages touting eco-friendly, recycled, cruelty-free, happy hens, free-range. Wait a minute. What’s going on here? Suddenly, marketers are responding to the call of conscious consumers who want to be environmentally friendly and even kind to animals. Ah, there was my argument for the inherent goodness. But, just as the thought came to mind, my friend reminded me of the inherent flaw – we’re being duped.

Nothing gets our ire up more than being duped, hoodwinked, bamboozled. So, we conscious consumers set off to shop in a truly conscious place – the local co-op or natural food store. They won’t steer us wrong. There on the shelves a couple aisles over from the cruelty-free shampoo you can pick up your “free-range” eggs in smiling packages depicting friendly cartoon farmers and chickens running in the sun. Serene thoughts of nature, the family farm and kindness soothe your (inherently good) soul as you load up your cart. Let’s cut to the chase – you’ve been duped.



The industry is hoping these labels will ease your concerns about the mistreatment of farmed animals. But “free-range” labels make little difference for the animals themselves. According to *The Washington Post Magazine*, for birds, the term “free-range” “doesn’t really tell you anything about the [animal’s] ... quality of life, nor does it even assure that the animal actually goes outdoors.” Even Dr. Charles Olentine, editor of *Egg Industry* magazine, an industry trade journal stated, “Just because it says free-range does not mean that it is welfare-friendly.” No laws or governmental standards regulate the use of terms like “free-range” and “free-roaming” on egg cartons.

“Free-range” laying hens come from the same sources as the battery-caged hens. Over half of egg-industry chicks are born male and are considered worthless by the egg industry. They haven’t been bred to grow enough flesh quickly enough for the meat industry. These male chicks are disposed of by literally being thrown in the trash, suffocated or ground up alive. The females will still be so overcrowded that they will peck each other to death, so they have their sensitive beaks seared off. More often than not, they will be crammed in a shed with thousands of other birds with no requirements of the farmers to ever allow them sunlight or fresh air. And when these “free-range” chickens are “spent”

after only an average of two years, they will be tossed into trucks and mercilessly slaughtered side by side the billions of battery-caged hens.

Total U.S egg production in 2003 was 73.93 billion eggs. If factory farming operations (including “free-range” confinement) were banned, it is unlikely producers could supply our nation of 280 million egg consumers. From a practical perspective, there is no way to produce animal products for such a large population without cruelty.

“So, where can I get my eggs?” is often the next question. But, this question tends to ignore the billions of male chicks destroyed because they lack worth in the egg industry. It looks away from the needless, premature, torturous end to a hen’s life. It disregards the fact that in our crowded world, the typical American demand is simply not humanely sustainable. It discounts the fact that eggs are not a need, but a desire.

Instead, the question should be, “What can I do to end the suffering?” My answer would be to not support the egg industry. Trust your inherent goodness.

Egg facts:

Average time an egg industry chicken will suffer to produce one egg: 34 hours