



Rancho Cappuccino;  
Lawrence, Kansas

# Meet Real **FREE-RANGE EGGS**

## THE NEW RESULTS ARE IN:

*Eggs from hens allowed to range on pasture are a heck of a lot better than eggs from commercially raised chickens!*

**By Cheryl Long and Tabitha Alterman**

Most of the eggs currently sold in supermarkets are nutritionally inferior to eggs produced by hens raised on pasture. That's the conclusion we have reached following completion of the 2007 MOTHER EARTH News egg testing project. Our testing has found that, compared to official United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrient data for commercial eggs, eggs from hens raised on pasture may contain:

- $\frac{1}{3}$  less cholesterol
- $\frac{1}{4}$  less saturated fat
- $\frac{2}{3}$  more vitamin A
- 3 times more vitamin E
- 7 times more beta carotene
- 21 times more omega-3 fatty acids

These amazing results come from 14 flocks around the country that range freely on pasture, or are housed in large moveable pens that are rotated frequently to maximize access

to fresh pasture and protect the birds from predators. We had 100-gram samples from each flock tested by an accredited laboratory in Portland, Ore. The graphics at right show the average nutrient content of our samples, compared with the official egg nutrient data for “conventional” (i.e. from confined hens) eggs from the USDA. The chart on Page 44 lists the results of the individual pastured flocks we tested.

The 2007 results are similar to those from 2005, when we tested eggs of four flocks all managed as truly free range. But our tests are not the first to show that pastured eggs are more nutritious—see “Mounting Evidence” on Page 48 for a summary of six studies that all indicated significantly better nutrition from pastured eggs compared to those from factory farms.

We think these dramatically differing nutrient levels are the result of the different diets of birds that produce these two types of eggs. True free-range birds eat a chicken’s natural diet—all kinds of seeds, green plants, insects and worms, usually along with grain or laying mash. Factory farm birds never even see the outdoors, let alone get to forage for their natural diet. Instead they are fed the cheapest

possible mixture of corn, soy and cottonseed meals, with all kinds of additives—see “The Confinement Diet” on Page 46.

The conventional egg industry wants very much to deny that free-range/pastured eggs are better than eggs from birds kept in crowded, inhumane indoor conditions. A statement on the American Egg Board’s Web site ([www.aeb.org](http://www.aeb.org)) says “True free-range eggs are those produced by hens raised outdoors or that have daily access to the outdoors.”



Left to their own devices, chickens prefer not to roost in cramped, steel battery cages.

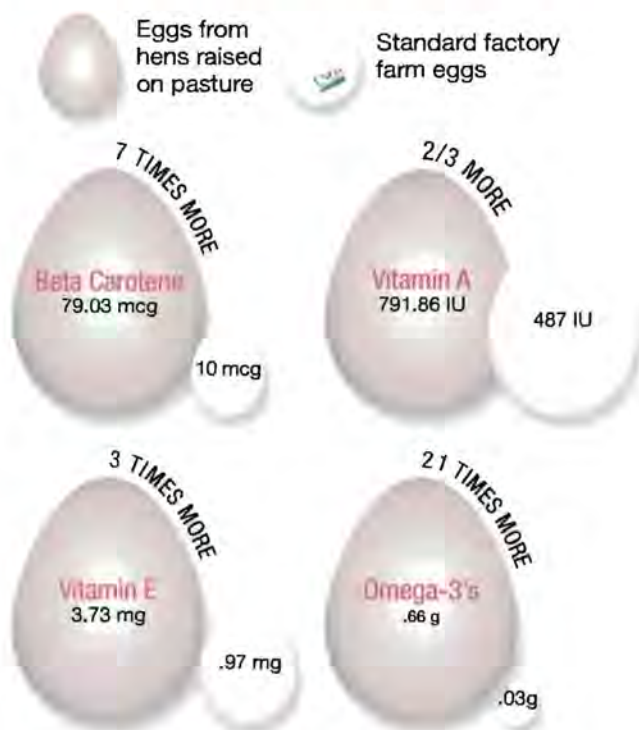
Baloney. They’re trying

to duck the issue by incorrectly defining “true free-range.” And the USDA isn’t helping consumers learn the truth, either: “Raised outdoors” is how the USDA defines “free-range” in its voluntary trade standards. This inadequate definition means that producers can, and do, label their eggs as “free-range” even if all they do is leave little doors open on their giant sheds, regardless of whether the birds ever learn to go outside, and regardless of whether there is good pasture or just bare dirt or concrete outside those doors!

Both organizations need to come clean. True free-range eggs are those from hens that range outdoors *on pasture*, which means they can do what’s natural—forage for all manner of green plants and insects.

The Egg Board statement goes on to say: “The nutrient content

## Pastured Eggs Have More of the Good Stuff...



## ...and Less of the Bad Stuff



mcg: microgram  
 IU: international unit  
 mg: milligram  
 g: gram



These happy hens at Misty Meadows Farm in Washington produce eggs with 27 times more omega-3 fatty acids than conventional eggs!

## realfood

Association has about 500 members.

After our 2005 report about the high nutrient levels in pastured eggs, the Egg Nutrition Council “questioned” our “suggestion” that pastured eggs were better in their August 8, 2005 newsletter:

“Barring special diets or breeds, egg nutrients are most likely similar for egg-laying hens, no matter how they are raised.” There’s that double-speak, again: “Barring special diets ...” Since when are diets not a part of how chickens

of eggs is not affected by whether hens are raised free-range or in floor or cage operations.”

Again, that is hogwash. They think they can simply ignore the growing body of evidence that clearly shows that eggs are far superior when the hens are allowed to eat their natural diet. Or maybe they think it’s OK to mislead the public. As best we can tell, the American Egg Board’s Web site never mentions eggs from pastured hens, even though the American Pastured Poultry Producers

are raised? Come on, people, we’ve cited six studies showing that pastured eggs are better. The best you can say is “most likely” we are wrong? Cite some science to support your assertions!

The U.S. Poultry and Egg Association offers the same misleading statement on its Web site:

“What are free-range eggs? Free-range eggs are from hens that live outdoors or have access to the outdoors. The nutrient content of eggs from free-range hens is the same as those from hens housed

	<i>All values based on 100-gram samples.</i>	Vitamin E (mg)	Vit. A Activity (IU)	Beta Carotene (mcg)	Omega-3s (g)	Cholesterol (mg)	Sat. Fat (g)
Eggs from Confined Birds (per USDA Nutrient Database)		0.97	487	10	0.03	423	3.1
<b>Free-range Egg Averages</b> MOTHER EARTH NEWS, 2007		3.73	791.86	79.03	0.66	277	2.4
Red Stuga; Topeka, KS; Welsumers		3.35	790	73.8	0.69	350	2.07
Polyface Farm; Swoope, VA; Mixed Non-Hybrid Breeds		7.37	763	76.2	0.71	292	2.31
Shady Grove Farm/American Livestock Breeds Conservancy; Hurdle Mills, NC; Buckeyes		2.68	683	42.0	0.59	321	3.16
Norton Creek Products; Blodgett, OR; Mixed Breeds		2.68	781	102.0	0.55	272	1.88
Skagit River Ranch; Sedro Woolley, WA; Mixed Breeds		4.02	1013	99.6	0.74	335	2.68
Spring Mountain Farms; Lehighton, PA; Red Sex-Links		5.36	813	90.0	0.68	231	1.99
Harmony Hill; Troutville, VA; Rhode Island Reds		1.34	700	69.6	0.49	286	3.38
Rocky Run Farm; Dunnville, KY; Brown Leghorns		2.68	Not Tested	Not Tested	0.64	301	2.48
Misty Meadows Farm; Everson, WA; Red Sex-Links		3.35	Not Tested	Not Tested	0.85	283	2.19
Sparkling Earth Farm; Burnsville, NC; Bovans Browns		3.35	Not Tested	Not Tested	0.80	218	2.68
Windy Island Acres; Dayville, CT; Mixed Breeds		6.03	Not Tested	Not Tested	0.52	271	2.60
World’s Best Eggs; Elgin, TX; Bovan Browns		4.02	Not Tested	Not Tested	0.46	246	2.01
Longbranch Farm; Fair Play, SC; Araucanas/Ameraucanas		1.34	Not Tested	Not Tested	0.87	271	2.37
Springfield Farm; Sparks, MD; Red Sex-Links		4.69	Not Tested	Not Tested	0.60	201	1.83

## Why Pastured Eggs are the Best



Choose pastured eggs to support local farmers, such as the folks at Springfield Farm in Maryland, whose eggs have less than half the cholesterol of commercially raised eggs.

in production facilities with cages.”

It’s amazing what a group can do with a \$20 million annual budget. That’s what factory-farm eggs producers pay to fund the AEB each year to convince the public to keep buying their eggs, which we now believe are substandard.

The Egg Board’s misleading claims about free-range/pastured eggs pervade the Internet, even though it’s been aware of all the evidence about the nutrient differences, at least since our 2005 report. We found virtually the same statement denying any difference in nutrient content on Web sites of the American Council on Science and Health (an industry-funded nonprofit), the Iowa Egg Council, the Georgia Egg Commission, the Alberta (Canada) Egg Producers, Hormel Foods, CalMaine Foods and NuCal Foods

## The Confinement Diet

Here’s the ingredients list from 16 percent Layer Crumbles, a feed designed for hens raised in confinement:

“Grain Products, Plant Protein Products, Processed Grain byproducts, Roughage Products, Forage Products [in other words, could contain pretty much anything! — MOTHER], Vitamin A Supplement, Vitamin D3 Supplement, Vitamin E Supplement, Vitamin B12 Supplement, Riboflavin Supplement, Niacin Supplement, Calcium Pantothenate, Choline Chloride, Folic Acid, Manadione Sodium Bisulfite Complex, Methionine Supplement, Calcium Carbonate, Salt, Manganous Oxide, Ferrous Sulfate, Copper Chloride, Zinc Oxide, Ethylenediamine Dihydriodide, Sodium Selenite.”

Customers get our eggs from the farm where they’re laid, so they see exactly how the hens live: in healthy, humane conditions. —Mark and Melissa Moeller, Misty Meadows Farm

Your egg testing is real culture-changing stuff, and I applaud MOTHER EARTH NEWS in courageously moving forward with it. —Joel Salatin, Polyface Farm

My best marketing tool is my customers, who regularly tell people that these are the best eggs they’ve ever had and worth every penny. —Ptryk Battle, Sparkling Earth Farm

We have many loyal customers who stand in line 30 minutes before the market opens to get our eggs. —George and Eiko Vojkovich, Skagit River Ranch

We support Shady Grove Farm because it’s important to keep our local organic farmers thriving. Best of all, the eggs taste better, are better for you, and add amazing flavor (and color!) to our food. —Rachel Rose, restaurateur

We preach to everyone that will listen: Don’t buy animal products unless you can see the way they’re raised. If everyone bought that way, there wouldn’t be industrial farms, and the small farmer could prosper again. —Bill and Sharon Moreton, Spring Mountain Farms

We sell our eggs to several restaurant chefs — they’ll pay three or more times the price for pastured eggs over commercial. —David Smith, Springfield Farm

I’m in this for the joy chickens bring and healthful eggs, not profit. Sitting on the porch watching the ladies in the yard is better than any therapy, so they’re worth at least \$100 an hour to me. —Suzan Touchette, Windy Island Acres

I’m so fortunate to get fresh eggs from heirloom hens that spend their days eating bugs, grass and weeds. Their eggs are the most flavorful I’ve ever eaten! Plus, I appreciate knowing how fresh they are. —Heidi Hunt, addicted to Red Stuga eggs

It’s a real pleasure to return to eggs that have quality of taste, texture and looks. Now that I get the added benefit of less cholesterol and all the nutrition, I am simply delighted. —Danny G. Langdon, Misty Meadows maniac

(“the largest distributor of shell eggs in the Western United States”). But our favorite comments came from [www.supermarketguru.com](http://www.supermarketguru.com), a site maintained by a “food trends consultant.” It says:

“FREE RANGE: Probably the most misunderstood of all claims, it’s important to note that hens basically stay near their food, water and nests, and the idea of a happy-go-lucky bird scampering across a field is far from the natural way of life. ‘Free-range’ claims only mean that the hens have access to the outdoors, not that they avail themselves of the opportunity. The hens produce

