

Cage-free Eggs:

Hen Welfare and Housing Challenges

**SAMPLE
EXCERPT**





CAGE-FREE EGGS | CONTENTS

Raising hens with intact beaks to produce cage-free eggs.....	4
Pullet rearing is key to cage-free flock success.....	6
Fewer stressors, more stimuli aid untrimmed layer behavior.....	10
Natural hen behaviors lead to better performance	12
Latest cage-free ventilation, lighting and litter tactics	14
How aisle width in cage-free systems impacts hen welfare	19
5 questions about cage-free hen health, welfare	22
Calculating additional cage-free production costs	25
6 common cage-free egg production mistakes	27
3 questions on the future of perches in cage-free housing.....	29
Top cage-free layer hen management tips	31
How to mitigate dust and ammonia in cage-free houses	34
Reducing aggression and floor eggs in cage-free flocks.....	37

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INTRODUCTION

Cage-free egg purchase pledges made by restaurants, fast food chains and food service companies are directly impacting how producers are managing healthy hens and profit margins. Despite the best education and preparation, the transition to cage-free production is a complex and challenging process, even for veteran egg farmers. This cage-free series focuses on the best general management practices for cage-free pullet rearing.

Raising pullets in cage-free systems makes it more complicated to achieve consistent weight gain, flock uniformity and high livability than in conventional systems. Cage-free birds also run a higher risk of suffering from pecking, cannibalism, smothering and piling than their conventional counterparts as well as a greater risk of enteric diseases from manure exposure.

Successful cage-free flocks come from good management practices. Husbandry skills are essential when transitioning birds from a cage to a cage-free system, because the layer barn is an unfamiliar environment and food and water are hard to find.

The transition requires farmers to spend more time observing the flock's behavior, understand what conditions are causing negative behaviors, and make the necessary adjustments to the environment. Some cage-free hen behavior challenges include, laying eggs outside of the nest and generally aggressive behavior—both of which end up impacting the bottom line, if not addressed properly.

Ventilation, lighting and litter management in a cage-free environment directly impacts the health and performance of flocks and requires a new approach. Movement also creates new issues, too, like controlling dust and ammonia levels and creating a consistent temperature to prevent negative behaviors.

The year 2025 is the most common deadline for the more than 200 food companies and restaurants that committed to switching to cage-free eggs. Cage-free farming demands far different management skills for maximum productivity and will challenge farmers for years to come to achieve maximum productivity of pullets and layers.

It is critical to stay on top of the most important issues impacting the poultry industry today to remain competitive. The WATT Global Media Focus Series was created to help you achieve that objective, and ultimately succeed in reaching your business goals.