

Laying hen factsheet

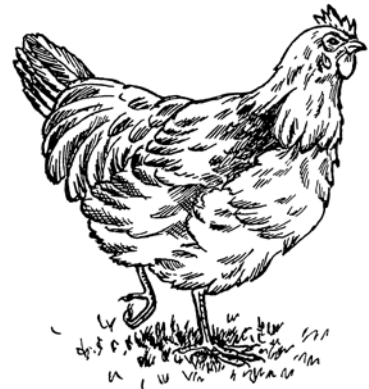
Name: Laying hen
(only females lay eggs!)

Lifespan:

Naturally about seven to nine years. On laying hen farms, they are usually kept for about 18 months, when the number of eggs they produce starts to decrease.

Natural behaviour – hens need to:

- stretch their wings and clean them by dustbathing
- scratch and peck for food
- exercise – they need to move around
- make nests to lay their eggs in.



How many are there?

There are around 36 million laying hens in the UK.*

What's the point of keeping them as farm animals?

For eggs.

How are they kept on farms?

Rearing:

Just after hatching and until around 15-18 weeks old, young female chickens, known as *pullets*, are kept on rearing farms. These are usually large barns with places to scratch around and dust-bathe. Many have perches and some have an outdoor area. Pullets being reared for caged egg farms may be reared in cages. Just before they begin to lay eggs, pullets are moved to a laying farm

Laying hen systems

Battery:

Hens live in a cage with less space each than the size of an A4 piece of paper. Birds can't flap their wings or move around properly and so find it difficult to exercise or move away from other more aggressive hens. Conventional or barren battery cages were banned in Europe from 1 January 2012 but 'enriched' cages are still permitted. These are still battery cages. About 51% of eggs produced in the UK are still produced using hens kept in cages.*

Barn eggs:

The hens are kept indoors but can move freely around the building. They have places to dustbathe, scratch, nest and perch. About three per cent of eggs from laying hens in the UK are produced using this system.*

Free-range:

Hens are kept in barns but can also go outside during the day. Each hen should have a minimum of four square metres outside and access to shade and shelter. They can scratch and peck on outside ground.

About 46 per cent of eggs from laying hens in the UK are produced using this system.*

Did you know?

Hens are strongly motivated to gain access to a suitable nest site in which to lay their eggs and will perform complex pre-laying behaviours. Provision of a nest area has been identified as a very important welfare need.

* information correct as of 2013.