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Contributors

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THE EGG STORY

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WHERE DO EGGS COME FROM?

Eggs come from birds – all birds lay eggs. An egg is formed by a female bird's reproductive system in the same way as other female mammals (people, dogs, cats etc). If the egg has been fertilised a baby chick will develop inside it. The eggs that we eat have not been fertilised.

Unlike mammals, whose eggs develop into fully formed babies inside the body, birds lay eggs which they sit on to keep warm and dry while the baby bird or chick grows inside the shell until it is big enough to hatch.

The eggs we eat mostly come from hens, which are kept by farmers to provide eggs for us to eat every day.

WHY DO HENS LAY EGGS EVERY DAY?

If a bird's eggs are removed from its nest, the bird will lay more eggs. So when the farmer takes the eggs away from his hens they lay more eggs to replace them. This is why we have eggs all year round instead of just in the spring when wild birds lay their eggs.

Remember that if you find an egg in a nest in a tree it may be fertile, which means that it will contain a baby chick, so be careful not to disturb the eggs because you might hurt the chicks inside.

WHEN WERE EGGS FIRST EATEN?

No one knows when the first eggs were ever eaten by man, but we do know that about 4,000 years ago the idea of eating eggs was discovered by hunters and gatherers in Asia who hunted wild hens to feed their families.

If a hunter managed to catch too many hens he would keep them alive in a pen until they were needed for food. While they were in the pen the wild hens would lay eggs and the hunter would collect the eggs for eating – much as we do today.

HOW ARE HENS KEPT TODAY?

Today there are two main ways that farmers keep hens to lay eggs for us to eat – on free-range farms or battery farms.

The FREE-RANGE FARM is where hens are kept much in the same way as the hunter and gatherers of 4,000 years ago used to keep them, in other words they are allowed to range free. This means that they wander over the farm yard or in an enclosed area which is mainly covered with vegetation, pecking about to find insects, earthworms, leaves, roots etc.

Free-range hens also have a hen house where they can escape from the cold or from foxes and other animals, and where they can sleep at night. In the free-range system the farmer has to feed his hens with extra food to keep them strong and protect them against diseases which they can pick up from the ground. Only a few of our eggs come from free-range farms because it is a very expensive way to produce eggs.

Most of the eggs we eat come from BATTERY FARMS. The battery has nothing to do with the things which you put in your radio. A battery can mean a line or series of something.

In the battery farm, hens are kept inside in lines of cages with four or five hens in each cage. The number of hens to a particular size of cage is controlled by the law so that nobody can put too many hens together in too small a space.

In the battery farm hens are fed automatically so the farmer can be sure that all his hens are getting plenty of food and water. Because the hens are kept inside, the farmer knows that they are clean, warm, dry and healthy and will therefore lay enough eggs for everyone in the country to eat as many as they like.

Hens in battery systems are also protected from danger from foxes and from parasites such as fleas or mites or from diseases carried by wild birds so that they are very unlikely to become ill.

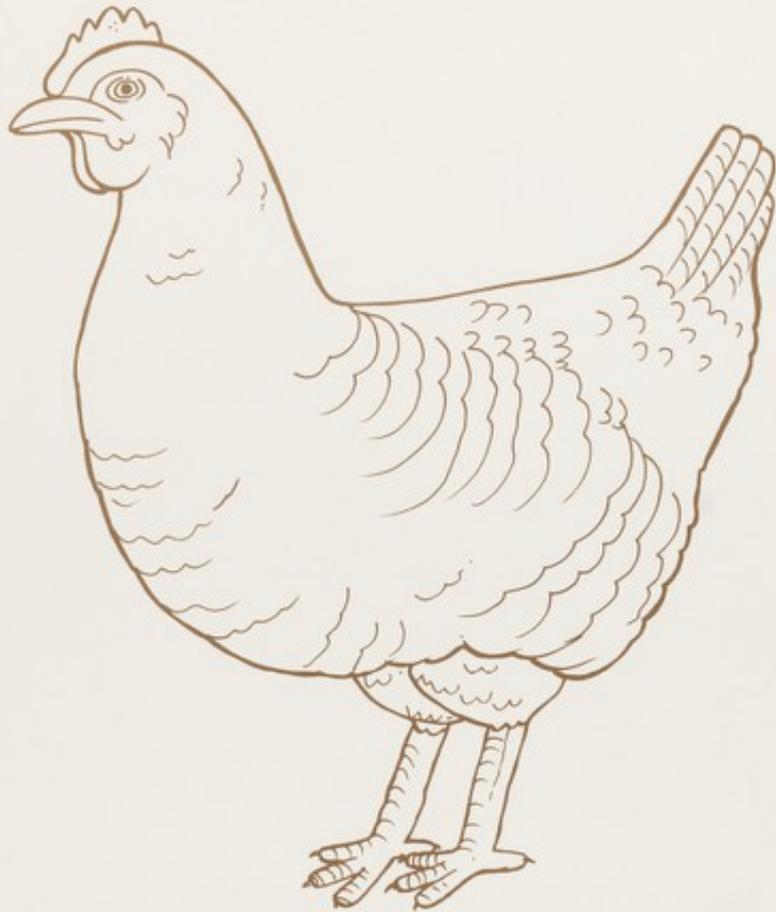
FURTHER TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

Visit your local free-range or battery farm if you have one nearby.



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Colour in the picture of the hen and copy this paragraph underneath it, filling in the missing words.

Hens live on farms. Farmers keep hens to lay eggs on _____ farms or _____ farms.

On _____ farms hens range free.

On _____ farms hens are kept inside in lines of cages so the farmer knows they have plenty of food and _____ and are clean, dry, _____ and _____

