

Laying Hens & Whole Eggs

Version 2.0: 2025



Reason for Standard

The “cage-free” label claim on eggs has fallen behind what shoppers expect for the living conditions of animals because it does not ensure meaningful outdoor access for laying hens. Organic standards also do not provide an adequate assurance of the outdoor access consumers expect.ⁱ Based on sales data, consumers have been choosing pasture-raised eggs over cage-free eggs and even certified organic eggs at least since 2013, when PCC ensured all our stores would offer pasture-raised eggs to meet the growing demand.

PCC consistently raises the bar on our standards to meet and exceed industry trends and consumer demand for more humanely raised animal products. By introducing PCC Private Label Eggs in 2018—produced from Wilcox hens raised on pasture utilizing mobile hen houses—and supporting increased supply of “free range” egg supply with the same supplier, PCC achieves its goal of raising this bar while also supporting consumers economic and animal welfare demands.

Scope

This is a product-specific standard that applies to whole, fresh chicken eggs sold at PCC and used in PCC-produced products in the deli and bakery. This standard also applies to the laying hens that the eggs come from.

Standard

1. Products

- 1.1. All whole eggs sold at PCC and utilized in PCC private label or deli products must be a product of a laying hen raised in accordance with the animal welfare standards set forth in section 2.
- 1.2. Vendors within the scope of this standard must adhere to the GE Ingredients and Labeling Standard, specifically the section titled “Animal Products.”

2. Animal Welfare

2.1. Habitat & Housing

- 2.1.1. Laying hens are not permitted to be kept in battery cages or any other methods of unreasonable, prolonged confinement.
- 2.1.2. Laying hens must be able to dust bathe.
- 2.1.3. Laying hens must have enough space to spread wings.
- 2.1.4. Laying hens must have access to perches and nest boxes in dark, secluded areas.
- 2.1.5. Shelters and housing must be well-ventilated and allow fresh air to enter.
- 2.1.6. Laying hens must have ample space indoors to express behaviors natural to their species.
- 2.1.7. Laying hens must have access to the outdoors for a minimum of 6 hours per day, weather permitting.
- 2.1.8. Outdoor access areas must provide direct sunlight and a minimum of 2 square feet (0.19 square meters) per bird.

- 2.1.9. Outdoor access areas must not be exclusively concrete and should be covered with vegetation, gravel, straw, mulch, or sand.
- 2.1.10. Laying hens must have access to housing or shelter that protects them from weather or climate extremes.
- 2.1.11. Heat must be provided in cold temperatures to maintain comfort.
- 2.1.12. Predator protection measures should be in place, utilizing non-lethal methods first.

2.2. Nutrition

- 2.2.1. Feed may not contain animal byproducts.
- 2.2.2. Feed must be distributed in a method that minimizes competition among animals.
- 2.2.3. Birds must have unrestricted access to clean, fresh water at all times.

2.3. Health & Handling

- 2.3.1. Except for chicks less than two-days old, no sub-therapeutic or non-therapeutic antibiotics or hormones may be used to control or prevent disease or promote growth or feed efficiency.
- 2.3.2. Laying hens must receive preventative health care for disease and/or parasites.
- 2.3.3. Ill laying hens must be provided immediate and necessary care.
- 2.3.4. Birds must be caught with both legs, not one.
- 2.3.5. Forced molting through feed restrictions or other methods is prohibited.

2.4. Transportation

- 2.4.1. Transport systems must be designed and managed to ensure laying hens are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort.
- 2.4.2. Transportation times (including loading times) cannot exceed 10 hours.

2.5. Mortality

- 2.5.1. Laying hen must be rendered unconscious before slaughter, unless meeting definition of smallholder farm.
- 2.5.2. Egg producers must ensure that supplying hatcheries prohibit live slaughter of male chicks and utilize humane slaughter methods.

Standard-Specific Glossary

Animal Byproducts include cooking oil from restaurants and food processors, blood and blood products, pork and horse protein, feather meal, manure, and hatchery waste.

Battery Cages are high-volume, small cages used as housing for laying hens in approximately 95% of conventional egg production. Laying hens raised in battery cages typically do not have the ability to stretch their wings, walk around, or go outside.

“Cage-Free” does not have a mandated definition but generally means laying hens raised without battery cages or other individualized confinements. It does not require that laying hens have access to the outdoors or that any other stocking densities or natural habitat be provided.

“Free-Range” does not have a legally mandated definition but does indicate that laying hens have some access to the outdoors. PCC has adopted a definition that is similar to Certified Humaneⁱⁱ and requires access to an outdoor area for at least 6 hours per day, weather permitting. The outdoor area could be covered with vegetation where possible; gravel, straw, mulch, or sand are also acceptable materials for ground cover. The minimum amount of uncovered outdoor area

required per hen is 2 square feet, which is roughly 17 by 17 inches. Other definitions of free range may only require outdoor access with no requirements of space or quality of surroundings, or alternatively, offer stronger requirements.ⁱⁱⁱ

Genetically Engineered (GE)/Genetically Modified Organism (GMO): A living organism whose genetic material (DNA) has been artificially manipulated in a laboratory through genetic engineering. This process creates unique combinations of genes that do not occur in nature or through traditional breeding methods, involving plant, animal, bacterial, or viral genes. Variability in the definition has created challenges in achieving transparency and consensus around GMO labeling.

“Pasture raised” does not have a standardized definition but most definitions require that the laying hen has spent significant portions of its life on vegetated, open pasture. This form of raising usually means that laying hens are allowed to feed on bugs, worms, and seeds found in the pasture, along with supplemental feed. Some producers limit the definition to “seasonal pasture raised,” depending on climate conditions of the producer and amount of time laying hens can safely be allowed to roam.

Smallholder Farms are defined as independently owned farms whose principal operator(s) owns the farm business and demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainable farm practices and animal welfare. The principal operator is the person who is responsible for the on-site, day-to-day decisions of the farm or ranch business. Any slaughter of animals on smallholder farms must take place on farm property with attention to humane slaughter practices where reasonable given farm size and scale. Gross sales of a smallholder farm must fall under \$250,000.

Sub-Therapeutic/Non-Therapeutic refers to a dose or concentration of a drug that is lower than usually prescribed to treat a disease effectively. For example, it can be common practice to add subtherapeutic doses of antibiotics to livestock feed to improve productivity

ⁱ Consumer Reports, *USDA Organic-Animal Welfare Ratings Criteria*, <https://www.consumerreports.org/food-labels/seals-and-claims/usda-organic>; 7 CFR §§ 205.239 (Livestock living conditions), 205.237 (Livestock feed), https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=3f34f4c22f9aa8e6d9864cc2683cea02&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title07/7cfr205_main_02.tpl; But see retracted Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Rule, 82 FR 7042, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2017-01-19/pdf/2017-00888.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Certified Humane Egg Laying Hens Standard, <https://certifiedhumane.org/wp-content/uploads/Std18.Layers.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ See *Animal Welfare Approved Laying Hen Standard*, <https://agreenerworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/AWA-Laying-Hen-Standards-2018-v3.pdf>.