

Cage Free Eggs: Behind the Myth




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www.HumaneMyth.org

Over the last couple of years, some animal protection organizations have begun working together with a segment of the egg industry to promote the consumption of eggs labeled “cage-free.”

At one private meeting between the nation's wealthiest animal protection organization and "cage-free" egg producers, the producers were reported as "expecting a business bonanza."

A white chicken is shown in a dark, confined space, likely a cage. The floor is covered with straw bedding. In the background, there is a green container. The lighting is dim, and the overall atmosphere is cramped and dark.

That same animal organization went on to produce a video promoting "cage-free" eggs. Here are some images from that video...



The images show chickens moving freely about in a clean and spacious barn.



The use of images like these gives the impression that eggs labeled “cage-free” come from “Old MacDonald’s farm”.

Press release photos also suggest that chickens used to produce “cage-free” eggs live in idealized conditions.

Major Heartland University Has a Heart for Egg-Laying Hens

April 7, 2006

With more than 40,000 students, the University of Wisconsin at Madison is one of the nation's largest academic institutions. And now, thanks to its food services department, UW-Madison has become a leader in an important trend that is improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of animals across the country.

In April 2006, UW-Madison Housing Food Services enacted a policy to begin using eggs from cage-free hens—switching to organic, cage-free eggs for both shell and liquid eggs in its dining halls.

The school's Housing Food Services buys approximately 85,000 shell eggs and more than 65,000 pounds of liquid eggs a year, so this decision will improve the lives of approximately 3,000 egg-laying hens.





But is the public being misled?



**Let's take a look at the reality
behind the myth...**

**...and pay a visit to Old MacDonald's
"cage-free" egg farm.**



A high-angle, close-up photograph of a large, crowded indoor chicken coop. The floor is covered with a dense layer of brown chickens, many with prominent red combs. Several blue, circular feeders are suspended from the ceiling by metal poles. The lighting is somewhat dim, and the overall impression is one of a very high-density industrial farming operation.


Virtually all eggs labeled “cage-free” are produced in large, industrial operations.



**The animals are crowded together
by the thousands into dark buildings.**


**The concentrated waste products
expose them to toxic gases like
ammonia and hydrogen sulfide.**





**Workers at “cage-free”
operations have even been
observed wearing respirators**


**If this is the reality of “cage-free”
eggs, why are some animal
protection organizations
promoting their consumption?**



**They say they are doing it in order to
replace battery-cage egg production...**

...with "cage-free" egg production





They say that chickens in “cage-free” facilities will at least have the ability to lay their eggs in nests, walk around and spread their wings...

**But does it
really make sense
for people who care
about animals to
lobby for the
replacement of one
form of exploitation...**

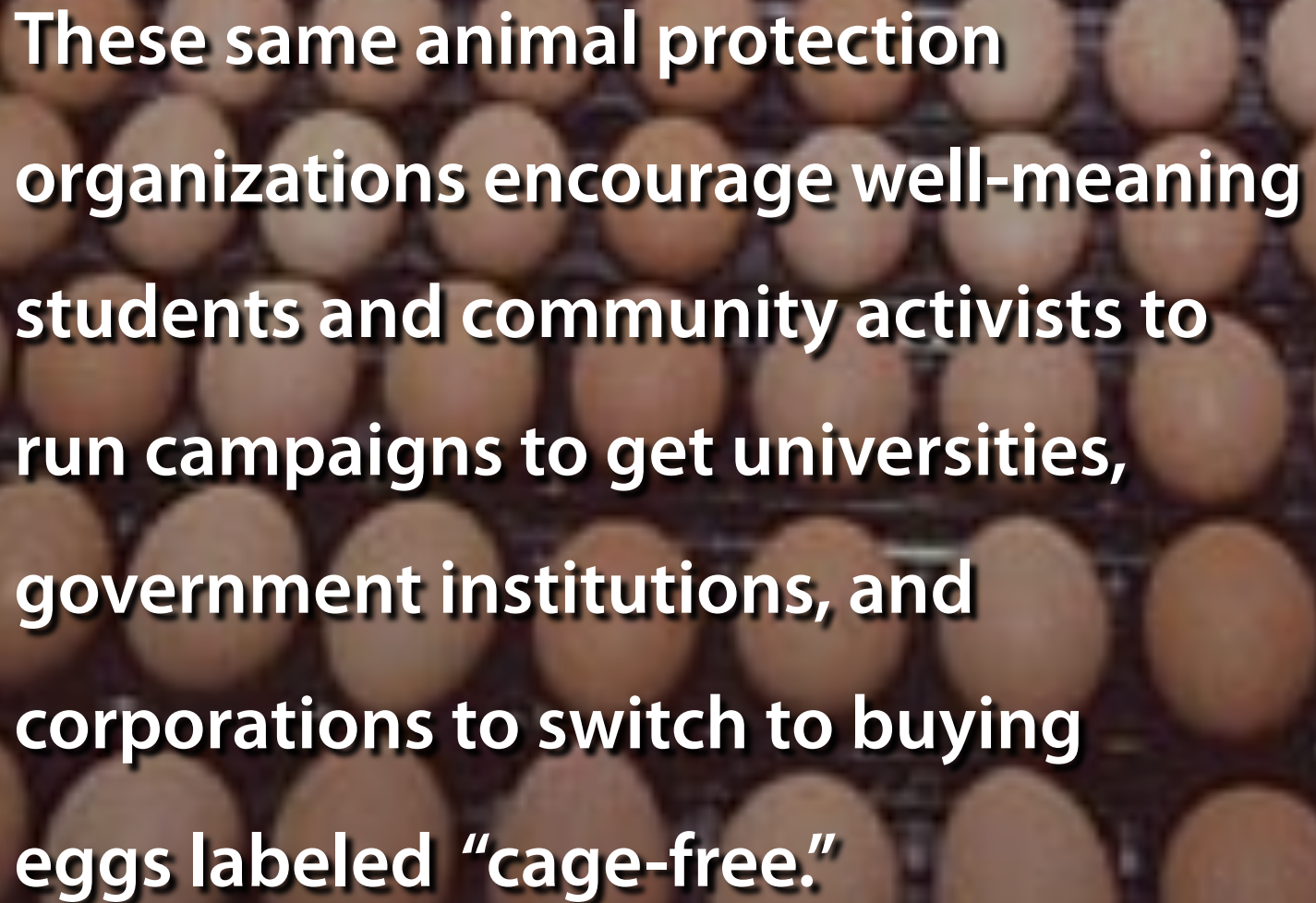


**“Battery cage”
survivor**



...with a “new and improved”
form of that same
exploitation?

“Cage-free”
survivor

The background of the slide is a close-up photograph of a carton of brown eggs. The eggs are arranged in a grid pattern, and the lighting creates soft shadows between them, giving a sense of depth. The overall color palette is warm, dominated by the brown tones of the eggshells.

These same animal protection organizations encourage well-meaning students and community activists to run campaigns to get universities, government institutions, and corporations to switch to buying eggs labeled “cage-free.”

Media coverage of these campaigns emphasizes over and over that eggs labeled “cage-free” are good for the animals, good for the environment, and tastier, too.



**In *The Harvard Crimson*,
animal advocates were quoted, saying:**



“Hens raised on cage-free farms can roam in barns and yards as the climate permits, nesting and running almost as they would in the wild.”

At another college, animal advocates were quoted in the media saying that if the university would switch to eggs labeled “cage-free”:



“We could pride ourselves on knowing that these birds were living a decent life...”

In *The San Jose Mercury News*, the food manager for a Fortune 500 company said this about switching to eggs labeled “cage-free:”



“We’re happy to do it. There’s a ripple effect that I think will happen. Other companies also will want to ensure humane treatment of animals.”

**That is what the public
is being told...**

but what is the reality?

Virtually all chickens used to produce eggs, including eggs labeled "cage-free," have their beaks forcibly mutilated to minimize the damage chickens cause each other when crowded together.

Beak Mutilation





To make the mutilation
seem less horrific,
the egg industry,
and now some
animal advocates,
use the terms
“beak trimming” and
“beak conditioning.”

**Damaged beaks never
grow back...**




**...and often
produce
debilitating
deformities as
the chickens
mature.**



Hatcheries

A photograph of a hatchery facility. In the background, two workers in light-colored shirts are visible, one of whom appears to be handling a large tray of yellow chicks. The foreground is filled with several wooden crates, each containing a large number of yellow chicks. The crates are arranged in rows, and the overall scene is dimly lit, with some light coming from above. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent dark rectangle in the center of the image.

Virtually all hens used in all forms of egg production, including “free-range” and “cage-free,” at both large-scale and small-scale farms, come from hatcheries that kill all the male chicks.



**Male chicks don't lay eggs and hence
are of no use to the industry.**

In the U.S., hundreds of millions of newly hatched male chicks are suffocated and discarded each year, or ground up alive to produce fertilizer or feed.





Rescued parent bird, her back raw from continuous mounting by roosters to produce more fertilized eggs.

Parent Birds

The fertilized eggs required by hatcheries come from individuals who are forced to mate over and over, until they are too damaged to be productive.

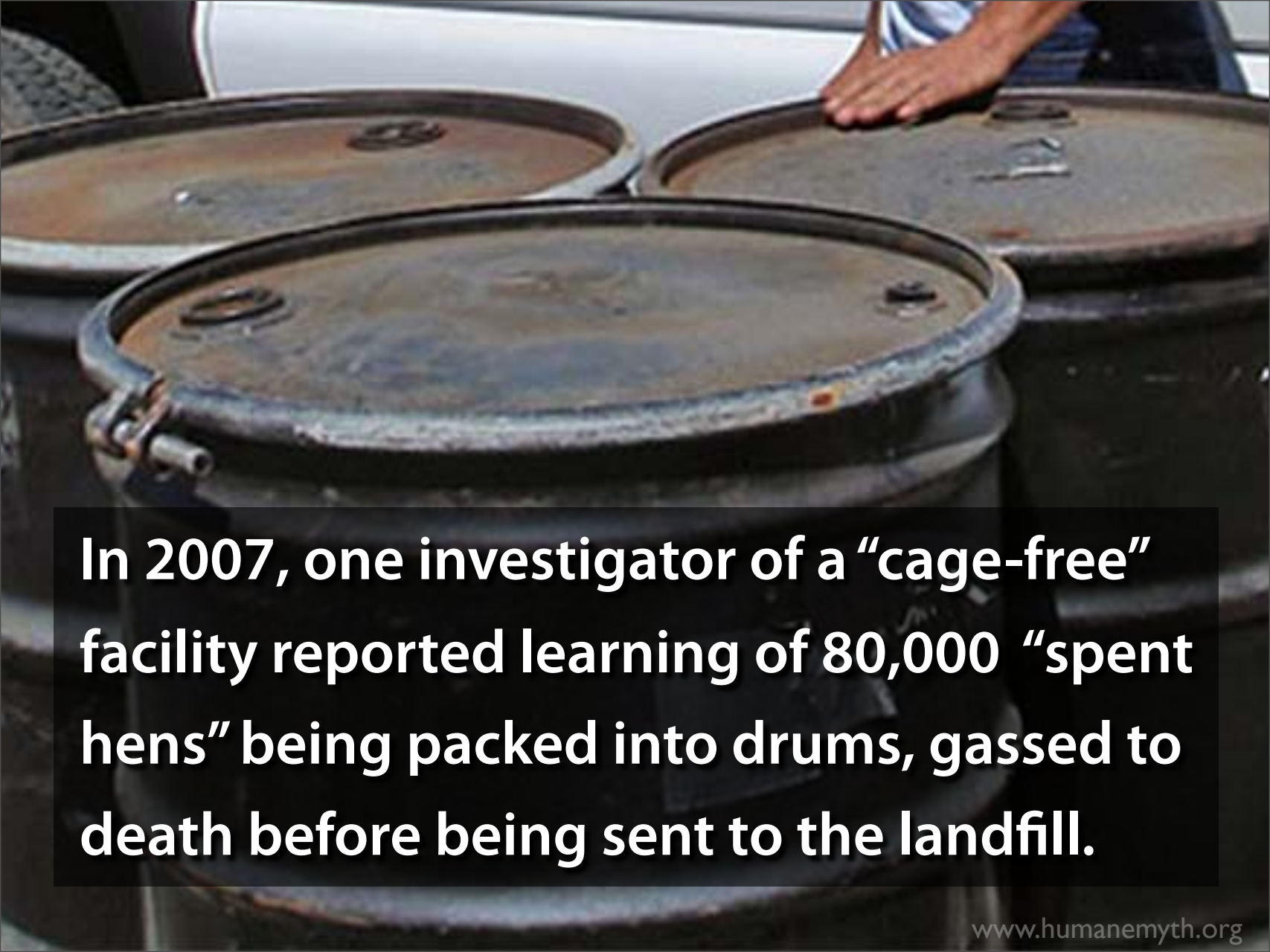
Premature Death



All scales and styles of egg-producing operations kill laying hens when their production declines, typically within two years, as feeding these worn-out individuals cuts directly into profits.

Often their bodies are so ravaged
that they are used for fertilizer,
processed into animal feed,
or just sent to
the landfill.

“Spent hen” processing plant



In 2007, one investigator of a “cage-free” facility reported learning of 80,000 “spent hens” being packed into drums, gassed to death before being sent to the landfill.

**Can any of this be fairly
considered “respectful,”
“compassionate” or “humane?”**

The truth of the matter

is that regardless of the style of farming, producing eggs is a business based on breeding animals into existence, controlling their lives, and killing them when their continued existence is no longer profitable.

The truth of the matter

is that a recent United Nations report identified animal agribusiness as the number one cause of greenhouse gas impact--more than all cars, trucks, buses, trains, ships and planes combined.

The truth of the matter

is that each purchase of eggs, or the many processed foods that contain them, means more chickens brought into existence, more male chicks killed, and more laying hens exploited, exhausted, and slaughtered.

We can do better.




**Living free of exploitation and slaughter,
chickens can live ten years or more.**

**They protect, feed,
and nurture their
young, just
like other
animals.**



These vulnerable individuals deserve our respect, and our protection.





For the animals, and for the good of our planet, consider becoming a conscientious objector, and refusing to participate in the injustice of the egg industry.

Resolve instead to eat a diet that causes no harm to animals and people alike, a healthful, plant-based diet free of eggs and processed foods containing eggs.



A wide variety of egg alternatives are available, including egg replacers for baking.

Each of our choices may seem small. But many small choices added together make a real contribution toward the creation of a just and peaceful world.



Don't buy into the humane myth!

www.HumaneMyth.org

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