

# GET THE FACTS

## ABOUT ORGANICS IN ALBERTA



### FROM THE HEN HOUSE TO YOUR PLATE

Did you know there are 170 local family farms in Alberta that produce more than 60 million dozen eggs every year? Find more fun facts about eggs and laying hens at Egg Farmers of Alberta.

#### EGG FARMING IN CANADA

When you're picking eggs off grocery store shelves, you probably don't think too hard about how they came to be in that carton. But once in a while, when you crack one open and see an unusually orange yolk (or even better, a double yolk!) you might be reminded that before that egg landed in your frying pan, it came from a farm.

It actually takes longer than you might think for an egg to get from the hen house to your plate. Here's how it happens:

**From Chick to Chicken** It's the egg-old question... which came first? The chicken or the egg? Either way, the life cycle of laying hens allows us to enjoy perfectly-shaped eggs for breakfast (and lunch and dinner, in some cases). This life cycle begins at a hatchery, where a fertilized egg is placed under an incubator until it has hatched.

According to the Canadian Hatching Egg Producers, *"Each breeder hen will typically lay 150 to 160 fertilized eggs over the course of a laying cycle that normally runs 24 to 36 weeks in duration."*

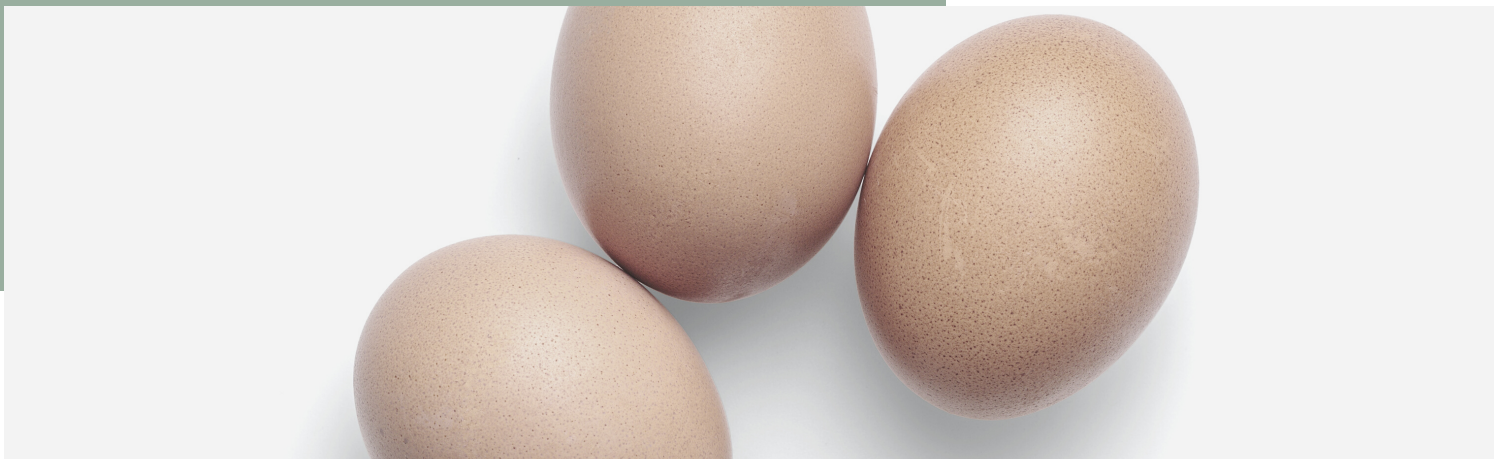
Hatcheries are where all types of chicken farmers source their birds, from laying hens to broiler hens. So, in other words, this one type of chicken farm supports all others. That's why hatcheries are regulated and monitored by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

**Growing Up** Like us, baby chicks graduate to the toddler, kid, and awkward "teen" phases, but thankfully, it happens much faster in chickens than in humans. In fact, it only takes about 19 weeks. A "pullet" is a bird that's less than 19 weeks old. Many egg farmers raise pullets in their own barns, separating them from the adult laying hens. Once they're mature enough to produce eggs, they're brought into the laying barn. Adult hens can produce an egg every day, although some produce them every day and a half or two days.

**Laying Around** Over the past few years, egg farmers are slowly moving away from small traditional cages called battery cages. They're opting for larger and enriched hen housing cages that allow birds to interact and display more of their natural behaviours. According to the Canadian Organic Standards, cages aren't allowed for organically farmed chickens. Farmers who choose to raise organic chickens and eggs must provide the maximum densities for indoors and outdoors, and access to the outdoors whenever weather permits. Many hens are housed in indoor aviaries with larger



GET MORE FACTS AT  
[ORGANICALBERTA.ORG/GETTHEFACTS/](https://ORGANICALBERTA.ORG/GETTHEFACTS/)



cages. Other birds are free-run (they can go anywhere in the barn) or free-range (they can go indoors and outdoors, weather permitting). Finally, there are organic birds, which are raised in specific free-range conditions laid out in the Canadian Organic Standards. Organically raised chickens must have access to enrichments like perches and are fed an organic diet. The bottom line with organics is creating an atmosphere that is as natural as possible. No matter how the barn is laid out, all chicken farmers make sure their hens have access to food and water, clean living spaces, and controlled temperatures. You can even tell what type of diet hens eat by the colour of their egg yolks. Wheat-based diets make for lighter yolks, while corn-based diets produce darker yolks. Additionally, free-range and organic eggs may have darker yolks due to foraging. And what about those green eggs and ham? According to the SPCA, cottonseed meal produces green yolks.

**How Your Eggs Are Cleaned** It can take from one day to one week to get the eggs from the farm to the store. Before hitting the shelves (gently), they go to a grading station where the eggs will be washed and graded. All grading stations are monitored and regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. The first step is removing any dirt or bacteria that might be hanging onto the shell. All eggs are washed and scrubbed in a sanitizing solution, then rinsed. Most of this is done with machines.

**How Your Eggs Are Graded** After being washed, your refrigerated eggs will move on to the grading station,

where they're inspected under bright lights that illuminate the inside of the eggs.

Eggs are graded as A, B, or C based on three main characteristics:

1. The condition of the shell
2. The position of the yolk
3. The size of the air inside the shell

Canada Grade A eggs have no cracks, a centered yolk, and a small air cell. Then the eggs are classified by weight (jumbo, extra-large, large, medium, small, and peewee), packaged, and shipped to the store in refrigerated trucks. Only Grade A eggs are sold in stores. Grade B and Grade C eggs are processed using a "breaker." These broken eggs are liquified and used as ingredients in other products. You can watch a video of the farm-to-table egg process on the Egg Farmers of Alberta website.

## FRESH EGGS FOR EVERYONE

The next time you pick up a perfectly shaped egg, you'll know how much work and care went into getting it to your plate. With plenty of protein, fat, vitamins, and iron, eggs are a healthy addition to any diet. And remember, all laying hens in Canada are steroid-free, hormone-free, and antibiotic-free, which means you can enjoy your breakfast with full peace of mind.

## WAYS TO LEARN MORE

Do you want to learn more about what organically-grown means in Alberta? Would you value monthly updates on Alberta's local organic sector – including legislation, farming practices, GMO regulation, and more? Now you can receive it the way you want to:

- **By Email** – Become a member of Organic Alberta and we'll deliver our latest article directly into your inbox.
- **By Facebook Messenger** – Be the first to read the latest information.
- **By Browser Notification** – Receive convenient notifications of new content the next time you're online.

