

ALL ABOUT EGGS!

Eggs vary drastically in price, so what differentiates them? What do all the different labels tell us, and what types of eggs are available online?

Following are the descriptions of chicken eggs sold through Idaho's Bounty Co-op, with key words underlined.

Then, from the September 16, 2008 New York Times Article "Sorting Through the Claims of the Boastful Egg" are the definitions of the terms used to describe eggs.

Durand Farms

Brown eggs from free range chickens fed all natural grains: wheat, corn, barley & oats, organic alfalfa hay & organic pasture.

Fair Mountain Farm

Uncaged, free to roam in the chicken-yard. They may be fertilized but we are not sure since our rooster seems somewhat confused about his sexual identity these days.

Izzy's Eggs

The hens are fed whole grains from local farmers and milk from the farm's 2 cows. Their mobile chicken house is moved to fresh grass every few days and electrified netting keeps the predators at bay.

M&M Heath

Organic Eggs, fresh from organic/vegetarian-fed, free range, happy chickens!

Morning Star Organic

Pastured on organic grass and alfalfa

Petra

Naturally grown, vegetarian fed, free-range. We feed these colorful standard breeds our home-grown, certified organic barley, alfalfa, non-GM corn and vegetable scraps. They live in a large coop and have a roomy chicken park to run in. They are released for several hours on the long summer evenings to roam freely throughout the barnyard.

How Birds Are Raised

(This is the more conventional description that might be denoted in the grocery stores)

CAGE FREE The agriculture department says this means that the chickens were kept out of cages and had continuous access to food and water, but did not necessarily have access to the outdoors.

FREE RANGE The agriculture department says that in addition to meeting the cage-free standards, free-range birds must have continuous access to the outdoors, unless there's a health risk present. There

are no standards, though, for what that outdoor area must be like. (A concrete lot could do.)

PASTURE-RAISED There is no regulation of this term, which implies hens got at least part of their food from foraging on greens and bugs, which adherents say can improve flavor. Some studies have found that pasture-raised eggs have more nutrients like omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin A, vitamin E and beta carotene, and less saturated fat and cholesterol.

What Birds Are Fed

ORGANIC Any product with the "U.S.D.A. organic" emblem must meet the standards of the agriculture department's National Organic Program. Among the program's requirements: birds must be kept cage free with outdoor access (though the time and the type of access are not defined), they cannot be given antibiotics (even if ill) and their food must be free from animal byproducts and made from crops grown without chemical pesticides, fertilizers, irradiation, genetic engineering or sewage sludge. If organic eggs do not have the program's emblem, they may be part of an independent or state-run program, and it may take some research to determine the program's standards.

VEGETARIAN-FED For eggs that bear a U.S.D.A. grade shield, "vegetarian-fed" means the eggs came from hens raised on all-vegetarian feed. Hens are not naturally vegetarian, though; they enjoy eating grubs, bugs and worms. While there's not a substantial nutritional difference between these eggs and conventional eggs, vegetarian eggs appeal to consumers who are turned off by some of the animal byproducts that can be included in conventional chicken feed, like feather meal, chicken litter, pork and cattle byproducts and "spent hen meal" (ground up dead hens).

NATURAL, NATURALLY

RAISED It means whatever the producers want it to mean because eggs in the shell are not a processed food.

FERTILE The term is unregulated but implies that the eggs came from hens that were likely to have been fertilized because they were uncaged and raised near a rooster. Some consumers like the idea of these more natural living conditions; others adhere to unproven beliefs that fertile eggs are more nutritious. Fertile eggs are stored at temperatures too cold for chicks to develop.

Imagine . . .

Knowing where your food comes from, who is producing it, and their ethics and farming practices

Working in support of the health of your local community food shed where energy stays local and supports our rural economy