

The *Civil Code of Quebec* states that animals are sentient beings with biological needs. Unlike in the past, they are no longer considered property.

What does this mean for animals whose eggs, milk, or meat we consume? The reality is that their treatment will depend on who is raising them and for what purpose. Let's explore the experiences of three different laying hens. This poster illustrates how their biological needs are considered in different contexts.

While animal welfare is increasingly taken into consideration by regulators and producers alike, more needs to be done so that all animals used for agricultural purposes, including laying hens, receive the full protection of the law.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Hens exhibit many natural behaviours such as nesting, foraging, roosting and dust bathing. They also like to stretch their legs and wings. Chickens are gregarious animals who enjoy the company of other chickens. Their life expectancy can reach up to 10 years.

## BELOW-QUOTA LAYING HENS

Egg production is controlled under supply management. To sell eggs outside of the quota system, farmers can only raise 99 laying hens per year.

There are many breeds of hens that can be kept: hybrids, purebreds, fancy, or ornamental hens.

The Chantecler heritage hen is particularly popular as it is cold-hardy and heat-tolerant.

## LAYING HENS IN CONVENTIONAL PRODUCTION

The *Fédération des producteurs d'œufs du Québec* has 196 members who collectively raise 5,712,902 laying hens.

The average egg producer has an annual flock of nearly 30,000 birds. The most common breed is the white Lohmann.

## BACKYARD CHICKENS

Many municipalities allow their residents to keep laying hens in their backyards. For our cooler climate, the best breeds for urban keeping are Leghorn, Rhode Island Red, Plymouth, and Wyandotte. Usually, by-laws require at least 2 hens for companionship and a maximum of 5 hens to minimize noise and odor nuisances.



### « WHERE DO THEY LIVE? »



Municipal by-laws for housing require each hen to have a minimum of 0.37 m<sup>2</sup> in the coop and 0.92 m<sup>2</sup> in the walk-in pen.

.37m<sup>2</sup> per hen  
.92m<sup>2</sup> chicken run

Per hen, this corresponds to about 5 sheets of letter-size paper inside the coop, while outside, the area is about the size of a desk.

The total area should generally be limited to 10 m<sup>2</sup> and the hens should always be enclosed.

### « WHAT HAPPENS TO THEIR EGGS? »

The sole purpose of raising backyard chickens is to collect eggs for personal consumption.

The sale of eggs is prohibited, as is any other commercial activity related to the keeping of chickens.



### « WHAT RISKS DO THEY FACE? »

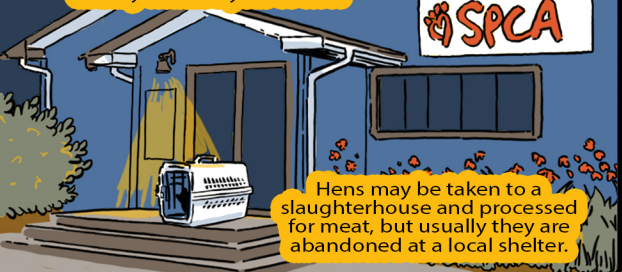
Foxes, coyotes and other predators are common, and birds can also contract diseases or develop health problems. Finding a veterinarian specializing in birds can be difficult.



Chickens can also be neglected by their keepers who either lack proper training to care for them or lose interest over time.

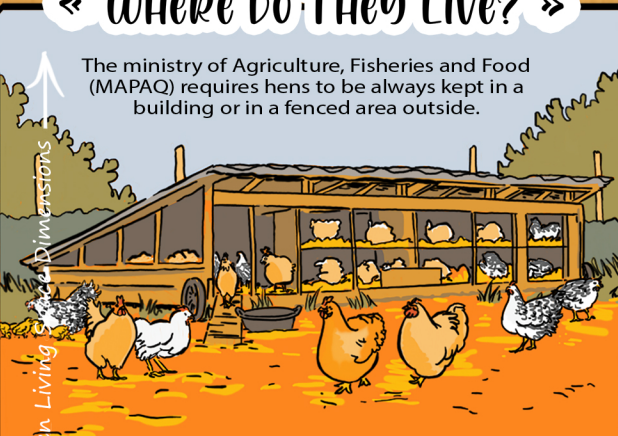
### « WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY ARE NO LONGER PRODUCTIVE? »

Although the hens can be kept for the duration of their life cycle, most people get rid of their hens when they no longer produce eggs, usually within a year or two.



Hens may be taken to a slaughterhouse and processed for meat, but usually they are abandoned at a local shelter.

### « WHERE DO THEY LIVE? »

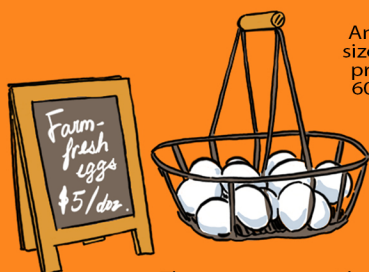


The ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPAQ) requires hens to be always kept in a building or in a fenced area outside.

[ dimension requirements unspecified ]

Unlike backyard chickens and conventional layers, there are no specific laws regarding the size of the housing or the enrichments to be included.

### « WHAT HAPPENS TO THEIR EGGS? »



An average flock size of 20-30 hens produces nearly 600 dozen eggs per year.

These eggs cannot be sold in a retail store, but they can be sold directly to consumers at the farmgate or farmers' market.

### « WHAT RISKS DO THEY FACE? »

In addition to risks of predators and disease, there is a lack of control and monitoring by the government for hens raised below-quota.

The extent to which their biological needs will be considered depends on the will of the individual farmer.



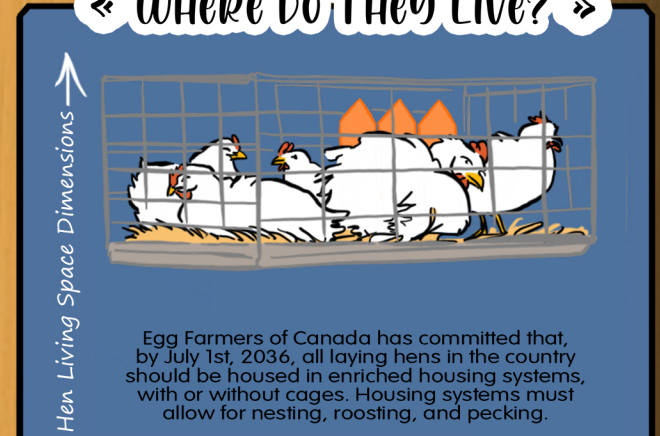
### « WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY ARE NO LONGER PRODUCTIVE? »

After 3 or so years, the hen will be slaughtered for meat. Farmers can take their birds to a custom slaughterhouse and keep the meat for their personal consumption.



Or, if they have the proper equipment, the Quebec government will soon permit below-quota producers to slaughter their birds on-site and to sell the whole carcass directly to customers at the farmgate or farmers' market. This is something that many small-scale producers had been advocating for for years.

### « WHERE DO THEY LIVE? »



Egg Farmers of Canada has committed that, by July 1st, 2036, all laying hens in the country should be housed in enriched housing systems, with or without cages. Housing systems must allow for nesting, roosting, and pecking.

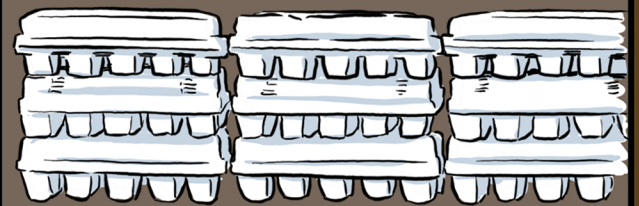
750 cm<sup>2</sup>

In an enriched cage, each hen has 750 cm<sup>2</sup> of space.

This is slightly more than a letter-sized sheet of paper, but less than a legal-sized sheet of paper.

### « WHAT HAPPENS TO THEIR EGGS? »

A single hen lays approximately 318 eggs per year.



Quebec's total production is 151,620,419 dozen eggs, making it the second largest egg producing province in the country after Ontario. These eggs are used for retail sales and food processing.

### « WHAT RISKS DO THEY FACE? »

Common animal welfare issues in large-scale livestock production are feather pecking, sternum fractures and leg problems (inflammation, infection, hardening).



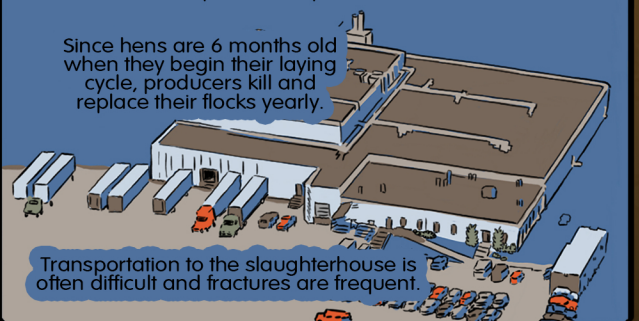
Intensive egg laying also diminishes calcium that weakens the hens' bones.

The causes are varied but are generally related to genetic breeding and crowded housing where birds have less opportunity to express their natural behaviors.

### « WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY ARE NO LONGER PRODUCTIVE? »

Hens are slaughtered after 18 months, when they no longer lay enough eggs to make production profitable.

Since hens are 6 months old when they begin their laying cycle, producers kill and replace their flocks yearly.



Transportation to the slaughterhouse is often difficult and fractures are frequent.

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To learn more about the authors and their research, follow Sarah Berger Richardson and Daphnée B. Ménard on Twitter @sarahfoodlaw and @DaphneeMenard.



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