

# Questions to ask your 'free range' egg supplier

## **How many hens do you have, on how much land?**

(The overall size of the property is irrelevant – it depends how much range area the hens are able to access).

## **How many hens in each flock and how many hens in each shed?**

Intensive producers usually run many thousands of hens in their sheds – maybe 40,000 or more. Genuine free range farms are unlikely to have more than 1000 hens in each shed.

## **Are the hens beak trimmed?**

There is no need for free range chickens to be beak trimmed unless they are intensively farmed. Chickens (like humans) tend to become aggressive when they are crowded together and beak trimming is the usual method of preventing them from injuring each other.

## **What are the hens fed?**

Hens on free range farms utilising low stocking densities and maintaining good pasture growth, will obtain up to 50% of their daily feed from the paddock. Supplementary feed is required to meet the nutritional requirements of each hen, to maintain bird health and for the farmer to obtain consistent lay rates. The supplementary feed should be natural grains – not pelletised feed containing colouring additives to enhance yolk colour. If the hens are able to eat green feed there is no need for these additives which often cause allergic reactions in people who eat those eggs.

## **Does the feed contain meat meal?**

Many egg producers (particularly those using pelletised feed) include meat meal in the hens' diet. While chickens are not vegetarian – they eat worms, spiders and insects which they find in the paddocks – the meat meal included in poultry feed is often derived from dead poultry. This can be either male chicks which are destroyed at hatcheries or 'spent' hens which have ended their useful lives on cage or barn farms. Giving same species feed to animals is what started the Mad Cow outbreaks in the UK and Europe.

Unfortunately there is no guarantee that your egg producer will answer your questions truthfully. At markets, one egg farmer has been heard telling customers that he only feeds natural grains when it is widely known that he feeds pellets containing meat meal and colouring additives.

## **Does the farm have a food safety program in place?**

To ensure consumer health, egg farms should follow food safety procedures including temperature control. Does your egg supplier maintain proper temperature control when delivering or selling at markets etc?