

People expect free range to have certain standards and most would be shocked at what some companies call free range and the conditions their animals are in. Rules and regulations must be clear and not vague otherwise they will definitely be exploited by some who are all about profit and not animal welfare. Terms like “regular and meaningful access” should not be used. What does that mean? Apparently if the birds have access once a month then you can call them free range. That is not free range – daily outside access is free range.

Birds should be allowed to live their lives as naturally as possible and do what comes naturally and not be kept in cramped conditions with minimal access to outdoor pastures to forage. 10,000 birds per hectare is way too much especially when animal welfare groups consider 1,500 per hectare. This is a huge difference. To me this means profits are the priority not the animals’ welfare.

When I buy free range I expect the birds to have **daily** exercise in pastures and not be in high stocking densities. The eggs I buy are either from Out ‘N’ About Eggs which have 400 birds or the Good Farmer which have 1,500 per hectare. If the amount of birds is not stated on the packaging I will not buy them – to me that means they are hiding something.

So people can make informed and better choices, all packaging should be clearly marked with as much information as possible. I would like to see at least how many birds per hectare and whether they have daily outdoor access and whether they are pasture raised and a real picture of their home – some packaging have pictures of birds in pastures with lots of space - real or false advertising? The more information the better it is for consumers to make decisions.

Websites must have all possible information about the birds and conditions etc so consumers can make informed and better choices e.g:

- Flock size and stocking densities inside the barn
- Size of openings relative to the number of hens
- Placement of physical structures and architecture inside the barn
- Whether they are pasture raised
- The condition of the outdoor range including providing adequate shelter, foliage and vegetation; and
- The extent to which the hens actually access the range.
- How many hens per hectare and how often they are allowed outside and what conditions i.e. paddocks with grass areas, dirt areas or whether they just have barn access.

Most people are concerned about quality of life for animals. I want all information possible including pictures (showing dates) which are regularly updated to be on the website as well. I know some places have live cam so you can see the happy hens - that is something I would like all companies do but realise that will probably not happen.

If companies are doing the right thing then they will be happy to have this information available on their packaging and websites.