

WEGMANS EGG FARM: THE **FACTS** BEHIND THE EXCUSES WEGMANS CORPORATE WANTS YOU TO GIVE YOUR CUSTOMERS.

THE EXCUSE: *We follow industry standards based on science.*

THE FACTS: Industry standards have little to do with animal welfare. Even the scientists who wrote the standards admit that standard industry practices fail to meet animals' basic needs and cause chronic, life-long pain.¹ Indeed, the standards permit a variety of cruel practices, including painful surgical mutilations without anaesthesia, starvation of hens for up to two weeks (to force their bodies into an egg-laying cycle), and intensive, life-long confinement.²

Hens at Wegmans Egg Farm are packed into barren wire "battery" cages, where each bird is confined to as little as 67 square-inches of space for her entire life. **That's an area smaller than a sheet of typing paper.** The cages are so crowded that the hens cannot walk or even stretch their wings.

Jo Natale claims that we "humans don't instinctively know how much space is right for a hen."⁹ That may be true, but according to Dr. Joy Mench, Ph.D., a scientist who wrote the industry standards, studies indicate that hens need far more space than Wegmans provides.³

Not surprisingly, the Better Business Bureau ruled in 2004 that the claims of "animal care" made by Wegmans were "misleading."⁴ In fact, the type of cages used at Wegmans Egg Farm are considered so cruel that in 1999 the European Union decided to ban them.⁵



THE EXCUSE: *The cruelty in that video footage isn't from our farm.*

THE FACTS: The producers of the documentary *Wegmans Cruelty* brought a Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver with them to the farm. GPS uses timing signals from U.S. military satellites to determine location to an accuracy of up to **two meters.**

The filmmakers then released raw, continuous video footage of battery cages showing the GPS receiver with latitude and longitude of **N43° 15.104'; W 076° 47.498'**. These coordinates place their video camera at the north end of Wegmans Egg Farm in Wolcott, New York.

Actions speak louder than words. If the footage was faked, Wegmans could have sued for libel. Instead, Wegmans lawyers asked Wayne County to charge the filmmakers with burglary (a charge subsequently rejected by a jury) for the crime of taking a few sick and dying hens to a vet. Ironically, the evidence used against the filmmakers **was the very same video footage** that Wegmans Corporate disputes.



In any case, we know from Wegmans' own documents that the worst practices shown in the film do indeed occur at the Wegmans Egg Farm: beak mutilation, hens trapped in pits of manure, and intensive, life-long confinement.^{11,14,15}

THE EXCUSE: *Hens need to live in crowded battery cages for their own safety.*

THE FACTS: Jo Natale claims that free-range hens have mortality rates of 20-40% a year, compared with Wegmans Egg Farm's alleged mortality rate of 8%.⁹ The 20-40% figure sounds impressive, **but it's simply wrong**, according to The Humane Society of the United States:

"Some proponents of battery cages claim that cage-free housing causes unacceptable mortality and food safety problems... In fact, normal mortality rates in free-range flocks are between 5 to 15 percent—less than the mortality rates in many molted, caged flocks. No scientific evidence exists to support the claim that flocks kept in barn aviaries have any higher mortality than flocks kept in cages, after controlling for breed and beak-trimming. Similarly, available data suggest there are no significant differences in food safety between properly managed cage- and cage-free egg production."¹⁰

THE EXCUSE: *Our practice of 'beak trimming' is necessary and painless.*

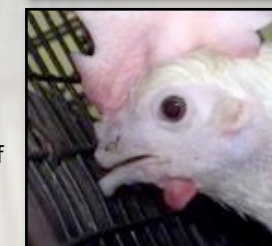
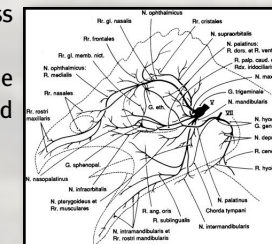
THE FACTS: "Beak trimming" sounds innocent, but it's actually a gruesome procedure that involves burning off sensitive, nerve-rich tissue. According to Wegmans' own experts, the process causes both acute and chronic pain.¹

It's unnecessary. Wegmans Corporate claims the hens are mutilated in order to prevent them from injuring one another.¹¹ While it's true that hens establish "pecking orders," their conflicts are typically fleeting and harmless: birds of lower rank simply flee from the aggressor. In Wegmans' cramped cages, however, hens can barely move, much less flee. Only in such abnormally confined spaces do normally harmless behaviors like pecking become a problem.

It's painful. Beaks are full of sensory nerves that provide feedback about the world. Birds use their beaks to grasp and manipulate objects, sense texture, and feel pain. As avian expert Ian Duncan, Ph.D. explains:

"[T]he tip of the beak is richly innervated and has nociceptors or pain receptors. This means that cutting and heating the beak will lead to acute pain. In addition, it has been shown that as the nerve fibers in the amputated stump of the beak start to regenerate into the damaged tissue, neuromas form. Neuromas are tiny tangled nerve masses that have been implicated in phantom limb pain (a type of chronic pain) in human beings."¹²

A diagram from the *Handbook of Avian Anatomy* shows how the sensory nerves in a hen's face extend nearly to the tip of her beak.¹³ Compare this with an image of a mutilated hen at Wegmans Egg Farm: nearly half her beak has been **burned off.**



THE EXCUSE: *We aren't breaking the law.*

THE FACTS: There are **no federal laws** governing the welfare of egg-laying hens. And unlike pets, farm animals are typically excluded from consideration under state anti-cruelty laws. In fact, any "common" farming practice is often considered legal, no matter how much cruelty is involved.⁶

By comparison, if Jo Natale subjected just one pet bird to the same abuses inflicted on the 700,000 hens at Wegmans Egg Farm, **she could face fines and jail time.**⁷ David Wolfson, Esq. is an expert on federal and state anti-cruelty statutes at Harvard Law School. He says:

"The public must be made aware of the cruelty that occurs as a result of common farming practices and the fact that laws do not regulate how farmed animals are treated by the agricultural industry. People just think that there must be some laws that provide some limitations in relation to the cruel treatment of farmed animals, but this is simply not the case."⁸

THE EXCUSE: *Cage-free eggs cost too much.*

THE FACTS: Customers often ask why Wegmans still lags behind other large grocery chains that have switched to cage-free eggs. According to Jo Natale, that's because cage-free eggs cost over 100% more, and only customers of "specialty stores" like Trader Joe's can afford such luxuries.⁹

But do cage-free eggs *really* cost 100% more? Not according to industry experts. A 2004 study found that cage-free production costs **only 5%-15% more.**¹⁶

Compare the street price of a dozen large eggs in four regions where Wegmans competes with Trader Joe's, whose own brand of eggs are cage-free. The greatest difference is just 32%—**just two cents more** per egg. That's far less than Natale's claim of 100%.

If an upscale "specialty store" can sell cage-free eggs at affordable prices, why can't Wegmans? Is Wegmans Corporate *really* claiming that **just two cents more** per egg—at most—is too much to pay to spare a sentient creature from a lifetime of suffering?

Region	Wegmans' cage eggs	Trader Joe's cage-free	% more
Fairfax, VA	\$0.89	\$0.99	11%
Cherry Hill, NJ	\$0.99	\$0.99	0%
Baltimore, MD	\$0.75	\$0.99	32%
Elizabeth, NJ	\$0.99	\$0.99	0%

Prices checked May 7-9, 2006. Elizabeth: Wegmans Woodbridge vs. Trader Joe's Westfield. Baltimore: Wegmans Hunt Valley vs. Trader Joe's Towson. Cherry Hill: Wegmans Mt. Laurel vs. Trader Joe's Marlton.