

Free-range animals

The myth about this term

The term "free-range" has no legal meaning, and can mean that the animals are in slightly larger cages than industry standards.

No government laws or standards regulate the use of terms like "free-range" and "free-roaming" on egg cartons, so some "free-range" eggs may actually be produced by hens who spend their lives in small, conventional battery cages. Often, "free-range" hens are uncaged but confined indoors in crowded sheds similar to "broiler" houses.

The USDA, which defines free-range and free-roaming for labeling purposes, relies "upon producer testimonials to support the accuracy of these claims."

Free-range birds are still subject to de-beaking, and male chicks are disposed of at all egg production facilities.

Free-range animals still endure the horrors of abusive handling, transport, and slaughter.

They are not always adequately protected against inclement weather.

Many die from dehydration or freeze to death. Sometimes they are swept away in floods.

Injured or ill animals often do not receive necessary veterinary attention.

They experience trauma and pain as they are branded with hot irons. They bellow loudly as rancher's brands are burned into their skin.

Accustomed to roaming unimpeded and unconstrained, range cattle are frightened and confused when humans come to round them up.

Injuries often result as terrified animals are corralled and packed onto cattle trucks.

They experience additional transportation and handling stress at stockyards and auctions where they are goaded through a series walkways and holding pens and sold to the highest bidder.

Cattle may be transported several times during their lifetimes, and they may travel hundreds or even thousands of miles during a single trip without food or water.

In bitter weather they sometimes arrive at the slaughterhouse frozen to the trucks sides. Workers literally rip them from the trucks, leaving chunks of flesh behind.

FREE-RANGE: Another popular but largely unregulated term. Basic USDA free-range rules say poultry must have some access to the outside. It does not

specify how much and it does not verify claims. The term has almost no meaning in terms of livestock or eggs.

"Cage-free" is a more precise term, indicating animals were allowed to roam openly, though it is not regulated either.