

ALL ABOUT CHICKEN



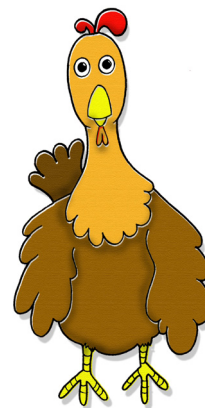
WHAT DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHICKEN WELFARE?

Chickens sold in supermarkets are described in all sorts of ways: woodland, free-range, organic, healthy-eating – or sometimes with no description at all. They are often packaged with pretty pictures of open spaces and happy farmyard scenes, but when it comes down to it, there are only two kinds of chicken farming: **standard** and **higher welfare**. Unfortunately, more than 80% of the chickens sold in supermarkets are standard. But about 13% of the chickens sold in the UK come from higher welfare Freedom Food indoor, free-range or organic farms meaning that there are higher welfare options available for all budgets.



Standard refers to your bog-standard ‘broiler’ chicken. In general, these chickens do not have a very good quality of life. They are reared in low-lit barns, with no natural light or enrichment and in very crowded conditions. They have very little room to move let alone run around, flap, peck and perch as chickens should. Broiler chickens were introduced in the 1950s and specifically bred for meat production. Since then, chickens have been bred to grow faster and faster. A standard chicken can now grow from an egg to an average roasting chicken in about 35 days – 10 days faster than in the 1980s. This fast growth causes a number of health problems.

Higher welfare birds are reared in more humane and natural surroundings. For free-range and organic birds this means more space and time outside during the day. And for birds reared under the Freedom Food scheme, to RSPCA welfare standards, there’s also enrichment in the form of straw bales and hanging objects, natural light inside the barns, shade and shelter on the range.



THERE ARE THREE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HIGHER WELFARE FARMING

RSPCA Freedom Food assured: If you see this logo when you’re shopping it means the chicken is a slow-growing breed and has been reared to the RSPCA’s strict welfare standards. Check the label to see if it’s free-range or indoor reared – either way it’ll have been provided with more space, natural light and enrichment. Look out for the Freedom Food logo when you’re shopping.



Visit the website for more information: www.rspca.org.uk/freedomfood

Free-range: These chickens are reared in sheds until they are old enough to be allowed access to the outdoors during the day. If the bird is also Freedom Food labelled then you know it is a slower growing breed and will have been provided with shade and shelter outdoors and natural light in the barn.

Organic: These chickens are reared in small portable sheds in fields, on farmland that has organic certification. They are fed organic food that is free from chemicals and pesticides, and have plenty of access to the outdoors. The Soil Association certifies over 80% of organic farming and food processing in the UK, so look out for their logo when shopping.



Chickens reared in these three ways have a better life and produce a tastier meat than standard birds. They get to run around a lot more, making their meat juicier and firmer. Remember, if a chicken on sale is not labelled in one of the above three ways, then it is NOT higher welfare.

SHOPPING TIPS

Free-range and organic chicken is often more expensive than standard chicken. If you are concerned about the cost, try eating chicken less often and buying higher welfare chicken with the RSPCA Freedom Food logo when you do have it. You can also be clever and use cheaper cuts like the legs and thighs, which are just as delicious. Free-range or organic chicken legs and thighs are often pretty close in price to intensively-bred chicken breasts, so look out for them and give them a try.

Jamie says: *"Most chicken in this country is consumed via pre-packed food like chicken breasts and – I cannot stress this enough – this is the most expensive way to buy chicken. If you buy a whole chicken, then there are million things you can do with it. You can probably get two meals out of a bird that feeds four people. That's eight whole portions of dinner from one bird... which is really good value!"*

COOKING TIPS

Chicken should never be eaten raw or undercooked. It's so important that you're aware of safety and hygiene when you're preparing chicken as the raw meat can contain bacteria and germs. Make sure you wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw chicken, and either use a separate chopping board and knife for chicken or wash and dry equipment thoroughly before prepping any other ingredients with it (see *Food safety: avoiding cross-contamination*).

To check a whole chicken is cooked through, prick the space between the thigh and the chicken's body with a sharp knife. Pull the leg away from the chicken a little and there should be steam coming out of the area. Any juices that run out should be piping hot and clear. If cooking chicken breast or thigh, check the meat is piping hot right through.