HOUSING SYSTEMS AND EGGSHELL BACTERIAL CONTAMINATION

COLLEGE STATION, TX—As America becomes concerned with “going green”, scientists are discovering that aviary housing systems, an organic housing option for laying hens, have a higher rate of eggshell contamination.

With this new information, consumers should think twice before purchasing organic eggs. While the consumer believes they are buying foods that are healthier for them, they are actually buying the least safe eggs.

For a better idea of what an aviary housing system is, they “provide platforms of slats at different heights, litter area on the ground and nest boxes” (De Reu et al., 2005, p149).

Compared to the conventional or furnished housing systems, De Reu et al. found that aviary systems had a higher rate of bacterial contamination. According to the study by De Reu et al., conventional cages and furnished cages showed no increase in bacterial eggshell contamination.

Conventional cages “provide[s] 450 cm² cage area and 100 mm trough length for each hen” (De Reu et al., 2005, p149).

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Furnished Cages “provide at least 750 cm\(^2\) per hen, a nest box, a dust bath and 15 cm perch per bird” (De Reu et al., 2005, p149).

As more research is being done on eggshell bacterial contamination, there is hope that a solution to the higher rate of contamination in aviary systems will be found so that consumers can continue to “go green” and buy organic.