

These Chickens Can't Cross The Road



By Ruth Kava — July 19, 2017



Chickens Leading Idyllic Life

The Organic Consumers Association avers that organic foods since they supposedly contain no pesticides, GMOs or other such "dangerous" items, are better for you. And buried in much of the organic literature is the premise that food animals raised for the organic market are treated better than those raised by conventional "factory farming" methods — that chickens, for example, get to root around in the grass at will as in the picture above. But an exposé recently published in the [Chicago Tribune](#) ^[1] begs to differ.

Writing specifically about Herbruck's Poultry Ranch, located in Saranac, Michigan, journalist Peter Whoriskey notes that Herbruck's is probably responsible for around ten percent of all the eggs sold in the US. His information belies the common misconceptions about organic chicken production. These birds are raised in huge barns, holding about 180,000 chickens each (over three birds per square foot of space). And although any birds carrying the USDA Organic seal should have access to the outdoors, get sunlight and fresh air, Herbruck's chickens don't really get those. Instead, they have access to areas ("porches") with roofs, three solid walls, and one screened wall. So surely, fresh air and sunlight can penetrate a screen wall, but is that really in accord with the spirit of the rules?

And as far as access to the great outdoors and the ability to forage naturally — nope. Now it may be true that smaller "mom and Pop" organic operations let their hens actually get outdoors, but at present, there's no way to tell where your organic eggs are coming from unless you go to the farm yourself and check it out.

Further, as we [explained](#),^[2] there are a number of procedures (such as beak-cutting) that seem less than humane, but which can be implemented in organic production. And attempts to pass rules that would force organic producers to act the way most people think they do have been [vigorously opposed](#)^[3] by large producers such as Herbruck's.

So while organic proponents may feel good about the supposed lack of pesticides and GMOs in their chickens, as far as the birds go, being raised organically isn't what it's cracked up to be.

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[1] <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-egglands-best-organic-herbruck-farm-20170713-story.html?source=acsh.org>

[2] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2015/11/19/cracking-the-case-of-cage-free-eggs>

[3] <http://www.acsh.org/news/2016/04/13/nothing-free-about-usdas-free-range-poultry-proposal>