



DEAR DEB - FEBRUARY 2023



Dear Deb: Why do eggs cost so much right now?

Answer: I love eggs – scrambled, over easy, hard-boiled – you name it - any form I can get them! But I was shocked at the price increase the last time I visited the grocery store. Holy Moley! From \$2.50 a carton to almost \$6.00! Inflation is taking a big chunk out of everyone's wallet and eggs are no longer the exception. California's egg prices, as of 1/20/23, have gone up 32%, according to the Consumer Price Index (December 2021 to December 2022)! Nationwide, they rose 59%.

I wondered why the prices had gone up so quickly. Of course, there's the inflation we've been suffering through for the last year or so – not much I can do about that. One cause for the sharp increase in price is an increase in demand. Eggs have a reputation for being a cheap, widely available source of protein. With inflation, consumers know they can lower food bills by buying eggs instead of meat, pork, or chicken. Also, many people have turned away from consuming red meat, resulting in an added increase in the demand for fresh eggs. Even with the higher prices, they are still a good deal.

But the most important factor in the rise of the cost of eggs is the deadly avian influenza (bird flu) which began its spread in early 2022. The epidemic proliferated like wildfire through large egg production operations with the result that many flocks of birds had to be culled to prevent the spread of the virus: fewer

chickens equal fewer eggs. It's very sad that all those birds had to be killed due to the bird flu disease because the chickens were so tightly packed in small spaces. Nationwide, 58 million birds have been "disposed" of to stop the spread of the disease. According to the USDA, California egg producers have been hit with over 750,000 birds destroyed so far. The outbreak is expected to continue hitting farmers – and grocery store shelves.

Farmers' Market egg producers are far less likely to have to worry about the bird flu running through their flock of birds. We support the smaller egg farms that allow birds to be cage-free or pastured so plenty of fresh air circulates. The welfare of animals is a big thing for most farmers' market consumers, and we don't like the fact that large industrial operations confine the birds, therefore spreading the virus faster. Besides caring for chickens more humanely, the quality of eggs at your farmers' market is much higher, the hens are well taken care of, and the use of antibiotics is practically unheard of.

Farmers' market eggs have always cost a bit more than those found at the grocery store. But they're worth every penny. We spoke with Shelly McMahon of [Shelly's Farm Fresh](#), an egg farm in Brentwood, and she stated, "We cost more because of the way we raise our hens. There is more labor involved because we actually look after our pastured hens every day while feeding, cleaning, and collecting eggs. Family egg farms have always been there. Now is a good time to support them during this time and keep supporting them after."

Purchase eggs at your local farmers' market if you are concerned about where your eggs come from. It's always the place to come for the most reliable source of the highest quality and humanely and locally raised eggs. Find a full list of our market egg producers here. Go make an omelet!

Have a question you'd like to ask Deb? Send it to deardeb@pcfma.org and we'll try to answer it in the next post.

TAGS

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