

# HICKMAN'S

## FAMILY FARMS

Dear *from Farm to Football* students and MVP Teachers,

Thank you for all the eggcellent questions! I hope you enjoy my answers as much as I enjoyed reading your questions. I broke them into categories to help you find your questions/answer a little easier. Happy hunting!

### FARM QUESTIONS

- 1. Do you have any roosters on your farms? Do you do breeding on your farm?** Our goal is to have NO roosters on our farms. Roosters make eggs fertilized and we do not want any fertilized eggs. We get all our chickens as day old chicks from a hatchery. We do not hatch any of our own chickens.
- 2. Any selective breeding on your farm? Genetic modification?** We do not do any breeding on our farm. There is no genetic modification happening on our farm since we do not breed. However, my brother Billy Hickman, was a maverick in DNA and ancestor lineage with chickens. He looks for breeds that are less high strung. We prefer the happy and calm flock and select breeds that tend to exhibit those traits.
- 3. How many eggs are produced a year?** We have white-leghorn chickens. Naturally they are supposed to lay 300 eggs per year when she is in her “teenage years.”
- 4. What percentage of eggs are hatched out?** We do not hatch chickens at the farm. We leave that business to the hatcheries.
- 5. What breed of chickens do you have?** We only have white leghorn hens. They are the most efficient (speediest) egg laying chickens on earth.
- 6. Do you have a favorite breed?** Our favorite breed is the White Leghorn. Although we love to hear stories from our friends that have backyard chickens with the different breeds. Each chicken breed has such unique characteristics!
- 7. Why are there different colors of chickens?** The breed of chicken determines the color.
- 8. How much is your electricity bill?** We do not share our farm costs. However, Billy and every manager demand that all water, lights, and resources are saved all of the time!

- 9. How do you feel about the cage free system?** We love our cage free system. It made our customers happy moving to this production method to know that the chickens could flock together and investigate their surroundings.
- 10. How much do they pay the inmates?** Our inmate workers earn minimum wage. They can save these funds in an account to pay any fees or to build up money for when they reenter into our communities.
- 11. How many chickens do you have?** We have over 7.1 million hens laying eggs for us.
- 12. Do you ever sell chickens to the public?** We used to sell hens to the public. However, because of biosecurity measures that are in place to protect our chickens, we do not allow people onto the farm anymore.
- 13. How long does a chicken stay at the farm?** In Arizona, our hens stay on the farm for just over 2 years or about 104 weeks.
- 14. Do you ever eat your own chickens?** We do not ever eat our chickens. Our chickens are laying hens (best at laying eggs) not broilers (better at producing muscle).
- 15. Do your workers get free eggs?** Our workers do not get free eggs. However, they can purchase \$15 dozen eggs each week for only \$6.

### **SHARMAN QUESTIONS**

- 16. Why did you like working at an egg farm?** Until High School, I thought everyone was working on their family's farm! I love seeing our family and staff working together to be hunger heroes. Plus, working on the farm is how I earn money to pay my bills and provide for my kids.
- 17. What is your favorite way to have eggs?** My favorite way to have eggs is fried or scrambled. I also like to eat a hardboiled egg while I am running out the door to work.

### **CARTON QUESTIONS**

- 18. Where do the bottles come from to make the recycled egg cartons?** Thank you so much for asking this question! When you separate your trash into recycling bins, YOU are helping us collect the bottles we use for our cartons. We get the bottles from the city that collects your trash. Please help us by separating your empty plastic bottles.
- 19. It's cool that it only takes 3 water bottles to make a 12-egg container.** We couldn't do it without everyone! In fact, if you see an empty bottle, please get it to the recycle can. Even if it is not yours, others will see you and remember to do it too.

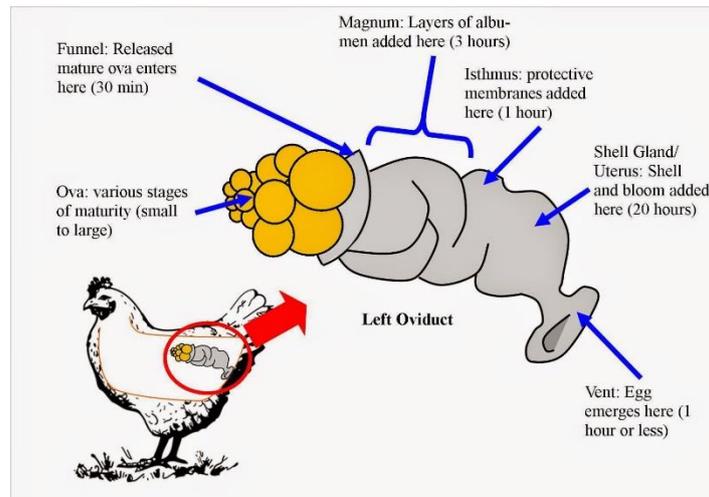
## EGG QUESTIONS

- 20. What happens to eggs that are too small?** The eggs that are too small to be sold as shelled eggs go directly to further processing and are used to make pastas, ice cream, cookies, cakes, other desserts, and even medicines!
- 21. How do the eggs not crack?** Billy and his processing department provide the safest journey from the hen to the consumer and take that job seriously. The conveyors and every transfer point are tested and retested to make sure there is no bumping, pushing or shoving.
- 22. How do they get the eggs on the conveyor belt without touching them?** There is a very subtle deafferentation in the level so the eggs can make their way gently onto the conveyor belt.
- 23. Can eggs be underground?** Some animals will bury their eggs, Chickens do not. Our hens will lay her egg and w3ithin minutes it will be on a conveyor to the processing plant.
- 24. Why are the eggs different sizes?** Eggs are different sizes depending on the breed of hen that layed the egg. For our hens, the egg gets bigger in size as she ages.
- 25. How do you collect the eggs?** On our farm, human hands do not collect the eggs. Thousands of feet of conveyor belts transport the eggs from the hen house to the processing plant.
- 26. How do you know which eggs you can eat?** All of the eggs at Hickman's Family Farms are immediately processed, inspected by our internal practices, our machine technology, and a random selection of finished eggs are tested by a USDA Inspector before the can ever leave our farms.
- 27. Are there only two colors of eggs?** There are several different colors of eggs. The color of the shell is determined by the breed of the hen that lays the eggs. The color of the shell does not affect the nutritional value of the egg.



- 28. How do eggs have a shell?** The developing egg, oocyte, enters a specialized are of the isthmus in her reproductive tract. The cells secrete two soft membranes that surround the egg. Then the egg moves into another area called

the shell gland. The cells in this gland secrete the actual shell material that covers the egg. The shell calcifies (hardens) and the egg passes through the rest of the duct/tract and she lays the egg.



**29. How is the yolk made in the egg?** The hen's laying tract naturally secretes the yolk, then it passes through the laying tract and the shell is formed around the yolk.

**30. How long does it take for the chickens to have their eggs?** We hope every 26 hours a hen will make an egg. Our average is five eggs laid per week by one of our hens.

**31. Do you keep any of the eggs and let them become chickens?** We do not keep any eggs. Our eggs are a source of revenue for our family. Also, our eggs would never hatch because they are unfertilized eggs that our chickens are laying.

**32. How many truck loads does it take to get the eggs to the grocery store?** This is a great question! Each grocery store gets their eggs from a 54-foot refrigerated semi-trailer. Each trailer can hold 22-24 pallets of eggs that contain 900 dozen per pallet. So, 237,600 eggs or 10,800 dozen are delivered on one of our trailers that deliver to grocery warehouses. Each store gets different amounts based on the consumer demand. Costco and Sam's Club order so many eggs that they get full truckloads to their stores.

**33. How many eggs have you sold in all generations?** We are proud that our 5<sup>th</sup> Generation family members are working with us. We sell over 1 billion eggs per year. Our eggs are even sold in Alaska and Hawaii.

**34. How many eggs do you get in a month?** Because we sell 1 billion eggs a year, if we divide that by 12 months we sell approximately 83.3 million eggs each month.

**35. How long does it take to pack the eggs?** Depending on the machine at the different farms, they can process over 600 cases per hour. That is just over 200,000 eggs per hour.

- 36. What temperature do you keep the eggs?** As soon as the hen lays the egg, they are transported to processing that runs 10 hours a day 7 days a week. The hens have an internal temperature slightly higher than we do but the eggs are washed, sized, and packaged and then put into a 32-35-degree cooler to wait shipping to customers.
- 37. Is it hard to take care of the chicken's eggs?** Agriculture is very hard work. However, we like to examine our current methods and think of new, efficient ways to do things our Grandparent started 74 years ago.
- 38. How many eggs can you put on 1 truck for shipping?** We can fit over 200,000 eggs safely onto a 54 foot semi-truck.

## CHICKEN QUESTIONS

- 39. Where do your chickens come from?** We get our hens as day old chicks from a hatchery.
- 40. What happens to the chickens after they stop laying eggs?** We humanely euthanize them in a pain free and respectful highly trained practice. Then they are made into dog and cat food and the fat is used in our chicken feed.
- 41. What do you do if a chicken passes away?** Our Veterinarian performs an autopsy to discover the reason for the premature death.
- 42. What temperature do the chickens like?** Our hens are used to living in 75-78-degree barns throughout the year. Backyard hens can survive in warmer temperatures, but our hens would get heat stressed.
- 43. What do you feed the chicken?** Our hens eat a completely balanced feed throughout the year. Their ration is a complex and nutritionally complete feed formula that is specifically designed for laying hens. Just like a professional athlete or a parent that always talks about getting you to eat the right amount of fruits, vegetables, and proteins.
- 44. What do they drink?** Our hens drink purified water. That water is monitored by the State and Federal Inspectors to make sure it is pure.
- 45. What do you do if the chicken gets sick?** We have a Hen Care Team that follows biosecurity and nutrition programs designed by our Veterinarians. Because they get proper nutrition and don't have any genetic predetermined health issues, they do not get sick.
- 46. How can you tell which one is a baby chicken?** No hens at Hickman's will ever have baby chicks because we do not have any roosters to fertilize the eggs.

- 47. How do you know if the chicken is a boy or girl?** That is done at the hatchery using technology and skilled workers. They are called sexers.
- 48. Why do they put chickens in a cage?** Chickens are prey for almost every animal or bird, including their flock mates. In addition, they are curious, and will often times eat their own fecal matter. When that happens, they get sick. Putting them in cages assures farm managers that she has proper feed, water, and is not getting bullied on the playground.
- 49. What do chickens do in a farm?** Our chickens investigate their surroundings every day. She spends the majority of her time looking for a private place to lay her egg. When the lights go off to simulate the day ending, she instinctively likes to perch. Just like flying in a tree to hide from danger.
- 50. Are all the eggs for people to eat?** All of our eggs are used for consumption.
- 51. How old does a chicken have to be to lay eggs?** A hen can start laying eggs at 15-16 weeks. The perfect time to start laying is about 19 weeks.
- 52. How old can chickens get to?** A hen can live 20 years if all goes right. However, most often they will get eaten or sick long before that. Our chickens stay on the farm until they are about 2 years old.
- 53. When chickens lay their eggs, what do they do?** Our hens will Hoover and roost. As soon as the egg is laid they get up and move.
- 54. How do you move the eggs once they are laid?** All our eggs gently roll onto a conveyor belt where they are then moved to processing on the conveyors.
- 55. Is there a specific number of chickens you like to maintain at all times?**  
Yes, we need to make sure that we can supply our customers, especially during the Holiday Season and Easter. Plus, by always adding new customers and keeping our original customers, we must continue to expand.
- 56. How do chickens make baby chickens?** Baby chicks only come from fertilized eggs that are then incubated at 100 degrees for 21 days. We do not have any fertilized eggs on our farms.
- 57. Why do they stay in the hen houses?** We have had to move far away from the cities because land is very expensive and wouldn't fit in anywhere downtown. So, when you try and protect your animals in open spaces at night in the desert, it would be too dangerous. The houses are built to keep the hens safe from predators and diseases. Wild birds carry diseases that can kill our laying hens and we have to keep them separated at all times.
- 58. What can happen to a chicken that gets sick? Does it cause the egg to go bad?** Because of our nutrition program and biosecurity, we do not really have hens getting sick. If a hen does get sick, her eggs are diverted to products that require pasteurization with inspectors for approval or they are destroyed.

- 59. Is there a fourth-generation ready to take over?** Yes, the fourth generation is actually older than my brothers when they took over the farm, so we are already there!
- 60. What ingredients are in nonchemical fertilizer?** Our Farms Choice Fertilizer only has digested feed formula from our chickens (chicken poop). It is treated to kill all pathogens, so it can be put on lawns, golf courses, and organic and conventional farm fields.
- 61. What is the biggest egg one of your chickens have ever laid? How much did it weigh?** Our older hens lay double and triple yolk eggs. Double yolks weigh over 37% more than a single yolk egg. Per egg a yolk is only about 3 ounces.
- 62. What happens when a chicken is done laying eggs for good?** A chicken can lay eggs throughout her entire life.
- 63. How does Hickman's Farm compare in size to other chicken farms around the world?** We only compare ourselves within the USA. We are in the Top 20 in Farms. However, we are quite a bit smaller than the biggest USA. It would be like a kindergartner vs a high school senior.
- 64. Is there a specific time of year or temperature that show an increase in egg production?** Since our hens are in a consistent 75-78 degrees, she lays 5 eggs per week every week. However, a sudden change in her environment like hot or cold can send an outdoor hen into a molt or at least reduce her egg laying.
- 65. Why do some people want hens in cages?** Some people like hens to be in cages because they can protect them better than if they are not.
- 66. How old is the oldest hen?** Our oldest hens are about 2 years old.
- 67. How do you know it's an egg, not a chicken?** Because we do not have any Roosters on our farm, our eggs are unfertilized. We will never have chicks inside our eggs.
- 68. How many chicks do you have every month?** Depending on the time of year the numbers can change. We have just under 1 million chicks to age 16 weeks.
- 69. It's cool how you make the egg containers.** Thank You for noticing!! We hope that all businesses and families are doing anything they can to protect our natural resources for future generations.
- 70. Why did the chicken cross the road? (To get away from Chick-Fil-A)** That would be dangerous, so we keep them safe in barns. Although, I did get a cackle at that!
- 71. How much do chickens weigh?** Gender and breed determines the size and weight of the chicken. Our feather staff tip the scales at 3.4-3.9 pounds each.

- 72. How old can hens be to lay eggs?** Hens start laying hens about 19 weeks.
- 73. Do the chickens get names?** Our most famous chicken is FUNKY! Funky represents our entire flock and our brand. We do not have names for our other chickens.
- 74. How many specialists do you have to make sure the chickens are healthy?** On the hen care team alone, we have over 1,000 employees. There are over 30 full-time people.
- 75. How much food and water does each hen need per day?** Our hens consume about  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound of feed per day and drink about .5 liters of water.
- 76. How many people work on your farm?** We employ over 1,000 people.
- 77. How old do chickens get before they die?** Hens stay on our farm for just over 2 years.
- 78. Where do you get your robots for packing?** We get our robots from different companies based on their function and purpose.
- 79. How many robots do you have at your egg packing plant?** There is a robot in each packing lane. There can be 20 packing lanes. We also have some really cool technology for our scales, daters, and inspectors that we did not have years earlier.
- 80. Can your chickens fly?** Our chickens can fly for very short periods of time. We do not need to clip their feathers.
- 81. How do you know if a chick is in the egg or if you can eat it?** There are sophisticated cameras and processes to make sure there are no foreign bodies in the egg. We do not have roosters, so we don't have to worry about chicks.

Sincerely,

**Sharman**

Sharman Hickman

