


Free-range eggs producer accused of deceiving US consumers

 [theguardian.com/us-news/2019/mar/07/nellies-free-range-eggs-lawsuit-packaging](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/mar/07/nellies-free-range-eggs-lawsuit-packaging)

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The producers of Nellie's Free Range Eggs have been accused of deceiving US consumers about how well it treats its hens in a lawsuit lodged in New York City.

The packaging of the eggs shows hens roaming open pastures and being cuddled by children. This is deceptive, the lawsuit claims, because Nellie's crams as many as 20,000 hens into crowded sheds, with just 1.2 sq ft of floor space each.

The US district court complaint, by four individuals represented by the animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Peta), further alleges that Nellie's provides little outdoor access for its hens and allows its suppliers to kill all male newborn chicks.

Nellie's New Hampshire-based parent company, Pete and Gerry's Organics, has labeled the eggs, which cost up to \$8 for a dozen, as "Certified humane". The Boston Red Sox recently adopted the brand as the team's "official egg".

"Consumers pay a premium for eggs they believe come from laying hens subjected to humane treatment with labels such as 'free-range' and 'cage-free,'" said Jeanne Christensen, partner at Peta's law firm, Wigdor.

"As the allegations show, consumers are buying eggs from an egg producer that subjects its laying hens to horrific conditions. This lawsuit is filed to hold Nellie's accountable for its betrayal of both consumers and the hens that are suffering from unnecessary pain and distress."

Pete and Gerry's dispute the claims made about Nellie's. "Our humane practices stand in sharp contrast with the overwhelming majority of egg producers in the US, and we can confidently say that our family farms have a flawless history of upholding our high animal welfare standards," said Jesse Laflamme, chief executive of the company.

According to Pete and Gerry's website, the firm partners with about 40 farms, with hens "free to roam outside as they please" for most times of the day and year. The company says it feeds its hens organic feed, without any hormones or antibiotics.

Americans' appetite for free-range or cage-free eggs has grown in recent years, with a recent report finding global growth in the sector driven primarily by Europe and North America. Some states have moved to codify these changing expectations of animal welfare, with California lawmakers voting last year to ban the use of caged hens by 2022.

Separate figures from the US Department of Agriculture show egg consumption is hitting record levels, with the average American eating about 279 a year. This boom has been attributed to the use of eggs in various popular diets.