

'Free Range Eggs' actually cooped up: lawsuit

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Nellie's Free Range Eggs are not all they are cracked up to be, according to a new lawsuit.

The New Hampshire-based farm, whose eggs recently became the "official egg" of the Boston Red Sox, is deceiving consumers about how well it treats its hens, according to the Manhattan federal court lawsuit filed Wednesday.

The eggs are sold in packaging that depicts hens frolicking in open pastures and being cuddled by adorable children alongside feel-good slogans like, "The grass is greener when there is actually grass," the lawsuit says.

In reality, the hens are crammed into sheds with limited access to the outdoors, allege four New York shoppers who are being represented by animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

The eggs, which range in price from cost \$4 to \$8 for a dozen, are "Certified Humane" even though up to 20,000 hens are housed neck to neck — and after 13 months of laying eggs, they are sold to slaughterhouses, the suit alleges.

"Consumers are choosing Nellie's and being duped by the pictures," Jared Goodman, general counsel for PETA Foundation, told The Post. "If they knew the truth, they wouldn't be paying a premium for the eggs or maybe not buy them at all."

PETA based its lawsuit on a video taken by someone who was part of a public tour, according to Goodman.

"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," Chief Executive Jesse Laflamme said in a statement.

In September, Nellie's, which is owned by a fourth-generation farm Pete and Gerry's Organics, announced that it will be the only egg used in Fenway Park, which offers bacon, egg and cheese sliders and other breakfast items through its suite catering service.

The hens "are healthy and have enough room to mingle and go off by themselves," added Mimi Stein, executive director of Humane Farm Animal Care, which oversees the Certified Humane seal.

