

## LOCALLY RAISED FREE-RANGE CHICKEN 101

Someone asked us recently if we carried chicken that was more “free range” than Wisdom’s Farm chicken. My suggestion to anyone wanting more “free range” is to raise chickens in their own backyard. In Colorado several counties are allowing you to do just that. You can learn first hand how to protect the chickens from the elements and natural predators.

Chickens need to be housed on cold days and at night. Chickens do not tolerate cold which is why most of the “factory farm” type facilities are in warm climates. Chickens also need protected places to perch and nest. Chickens do not nest on the ground. When I was in my late teens I had a job with a company here in Colorado called Gates Cyclo. Gates Cyclo supplied eggs to Safeway. The facility was out in Henderson, Colorado and the buildings are still there. I remember my first visit to the facility. The chickens were confined to very small wire cages stacked on top of each other with maybe 6-8 birds per cage. These birds were crammed in the cages with little room to move. I suppose this kept them from pecking each other.

The workers would wear hard hats and ride a foot lift to collect the eggs in between the rows and rows of cages stacked from slightly above the ground to the ceiling. The feed and water was automated and so was the light. I am a total animal lover so seeing these critters confined like that was disheartening but what really sticks in my memory were the trash cans full of dead chickens. Thank goodness this company is out of business but I believe the factory farm chicken producers still function this way.

Wisdom’s natural poultry strives to raise and process poultry as naturally and humanly as possible. There are absolutely no cages at Wisdom’s facility.

Wisdom’s raises two types of chickens – layers and broilers. The layers are the egg laying chickens and the broilers are raised for meat.

The laying hens are rescued from the “cage house” type facilities at about 18 weeks old. They must be kept warm and dry. They are housed at the Wisdom’s facility in large enough houses that each chicken has about 3 ft. of space for roosting, nesting and exercise. There are about 1500 chickens in about 4500 sq. ft. Chickens without adequate space will peck each other which can cause disease and require use of antibiotics. Also each new group of chickens is housed in its own facility. They are never fed antibiotics or hormones. Their environment is stress-free and temperature controlled. Their water comes from Wisdom’s own natural well.

Laying chickens love to be outdoors when the temperature is above 60 degrees and they are old enough. Wisdom’s allows the chickens more and more room as they grow in their enclosed facilities until they are old enough to be allowed outside. They still need to be protected from natural predators at night and also nest inside. Chickens do eat bugs when allowed the freedom of being out of doors, but you must remember that after the first frost in Colorado there are no bugs until spring. Wisdom’s is a family operation and Jay and Cindy’s daughters collect the eggs daily from the roll-out nests.

From time to time Rocky Plains runs out of eggs and you may see a sign on the cooler that says “Chickens on strike”. Because Wisdom’s keeps their chickens in a natural environment, if we have an extreme temperature change, the chickens have to adjust and that may mean that they quit laying for a short time. At large factory farm facilities, they probably don’t have this issue because they can totally control each element artificially.

The broiler hens are received as 1 day old chicks and are kept warm and dry in a small area of their enclosed facility. As they grow, the area grows with them until they have the run of the full facility. Broiler hens typically are not interested in being outside. These birds are hand caught and processed by Jay and Cindy Wisdom at just the right age. Their processing facility is USDA and they catch, process, cool and freeze the very same day. If you have ever noticed the skin on Wisdom's chicken is a natural color. If you compare Wisdom's chicken with chicken in the grocery store you will notice that the skin is unnaturally white. This is because the poultry on the grocery store shelves is dipped in a microbial wash to extend the shelf life. Wisdom's chicken is fresh and natural and does not need anything added. I can tell you it "flies" off the shelf at Rocky Plains Quality Meats!

Wisdom's Natural Poultry and Rocky Plains Quality Meats work together to bring you dining pleasure and good health. Check out Wisdom's website at [www.wisdomsnaturalpoultry.com](http://www.wisdomsnaturalpoultry.com).

**For more information about any of our products, please visit our website**

**[www.rockyplains.com](http://www.rockyplains.com) or see our ad here in the Consumer Report.**

**Dee West is a partner in Rocky Plains Quality Meats serving two locations in Northeastern Colorado: 4022 WCR 11, Dacono, Co. and 207 S. Washington Ave., Loveland, Co.**