



## Better for Birds, the Earth, and You: Kipster's Egg



In the United States, as of March 2024, forty percent of eggs produced are cage-free.<sup>i</sup> While the cage-free movement has gained momentum worldwide, one company goes beyond the baseline standard of cage-free and takes a unique approach to maximize the benefits of its system. [Kipster](#) is on a mission to revolutionize food production by prioritizing ethics and sustainability, ensuring a healthier planet for future generations. The result is better for the birds, the earth, and you.

### BACKGROUND

Most hens that lay eggs for human consumption in the United States are raised in a conventional system where laying hens are confined to battery cages. Each metal cage will house up to 10 birds and only allows each hen space equivalent to a standard 8.5"x11" sheet of paper. A myriad of welfare issues result from this conventional system, including frustration redirected into damaging behaviors such as injurious pecking and cannibalism, fatty liver disease, keel bone fractures, and increased mortality. The conventional battery cages restrict the space available to hens, and deprive them of essential environmental features, such as perches, nesting areas, and solid ground with earth and vegetation for foraging - crucial for their natural behaviors.<sup>ii</sup> The negative welfare implications for the birds are high, and there are other issues with intensive battery cage operations. Farmer well-being, environmental impact, and biohazard waste are significant issues associated with these intensive caged farming systems that often are ignored by governmental agencies and corporations.

Companies and consumers have become increasingly aware of alternative production systems for laying hens raised for their eggs and are demanding more cage-free, free-range, and pasture-raised housing. Many companies have set goals to eliminate caged eggs from their supply chains. Because of this, U.S. egg producers have a unique opportunity to meet this increased demand.



*Kipster Farm in the Netherlands, Photo credit: Kipster*

Kipster has taken an alternative approach to raising hens: one that prioritizes animal welfare standards, enhances farmer well-being, benefits the environment, and improves the overall production cycle.

### ABOUT KIPSTER

Kipster opened their first operation in the Netherlands in 2017 and then expanded into the United States in 2022. Kipster's co-founders sought to find a way to feed the world's population in an honest way, not passing any cost to future generations. MPS Egg Farms, the exclusive producer of Kipster eggs in the United States, operates seven farms across the United States that raise more than 14 million hens. Kipster operated by MPS, is in Indiana. The Kipster farm has three hen houses, with each housing 24,000 birds.<sup>iii</sup> The retailer Kroger Co. brings the unique egg to market in collaboration with Kipster and MPS Egg Farms.

Sam Krouse, the CEO of MPS Egg Farms, shared about the value of the Kipster brand: "If consumers value animal welfare, animals expressing natural behaviors, and chickens living more like they do in the jungle, there are models for that. I think Kipster is the greatest example of that." By expanding its model into the United States, Kipster sets a new higher standard for animal welfare in the United States with its attention to the true nature of hens raised for their eggs.

### ANIMAL WELFARE AT KIPSTER



*Hen perching on tree, Photo credit: Kipster*

Kipster has built its business around meeting the implicit nature of birds. Their innovative facilities were designed in collaboration with leading scientists and animal welfare organizations to suit a hen's inherent needs as a forest bird. Each farm is set up for the hens to carry out as many natural behaviors as possible. Key differentiators of the Kipster farm include both an indoor and outdoor garden with regular outdoor access pending bird flu risks, dust baths, and perches, which allow the birds to explore and play in their environment. Kipster's indoor garden includes perches, tree trunks, deep bedding, and large windows to allow natural light inside to benefit the birds.

Kipster uses the DeKalb White breed and does not beak trim (debeak) the birds, which is a mutilating practice performed without any pain control as an industry norm. Beak trimming is meant to limit aggression and pecking by blunting a bird's beak, removing approximately one-third of the beak. Instead of beak trimming the birds, Kipster prioritizes an enriched environment with pecking stones, hay bales, and scattered feed to keep the birds active and foraging. Kipster also allows ample space indoors and outside, so the birds have room to run, flap their wings, and explore their environments. Each bird in the Kipster house has 1.61 square feet of space, and the outdoor access areas provide an additional 0.98 square feet per bird. Comparatively, one battery cage can be used to house laying hens of up to 10 birds, fully enclosing the birds in a wire mesh, barren environment. In a battery cage, the average space allowance per bird is approximately 67 square inches, less than 0.5 square feet per bird, and slightly less



than a letter-size sheet of paper.<sup>iv</sup> To verify its practices, Kipster eggs in the United States are certified by the third-party program, *Certified Humane*.<sup>v</sup>

Ruud Zanders, the Co-Founder of Kipster, shares his farming philosophy, reflecting on a pivotal realization: *“I lived all my life between livestock, but then I was shocked when I learned about intelligent emotion and feelings from animals. As a food farmer, I didn't know so much about the animals themselves, but how I can keep and treat them, to keep them healthy, that they have enough eggs, but not too much feed. But now I know. That's why we try our utmost to give them the best life; we approach that natural way as much as possible. Realizing that truly animal-friendly animal husbandry in a commercial manner is very difficult, if not impossible. You always make concessions.”*



Co-Founder Ruud Zanders walking with hens, Photo credit: Kipster

Caged hen farms contribute to many of the largest agricultural sustainability and animal welfare issues. Kipster is paving a path that offers big solutions, leading the way for alternative models in the U.S. egg marketplace. By prioritizing sustainability, animal welfare, and farmer well-being, Kipster offers solutions to many of the industry's main challenges of battery cages for hens, poor farmer wellbeing, and waste. Kipster also offers a unique focus on transparency through its in-person visitor center and YouTube livestreams from the farm. Kipster posts about the daily lives of their birds on social media – both the good and the bad – so consumers can learn about the living sentient beings behind the eggs they buy.

Compassion in World Farming has recognized Kipster's leading animal welfare standards by awarding Kipster U.S. the Good Egg Award in 2024. In 2018, Kipster also received the Good Egg Award for its location in the Netherlands. This award honors Kipster's commitment to enhancing animal welfare and sustainability through its innovative cage-free and carbon-neutral egg model. Kipster is the only egg producer in the United States to receive the award in 2024.



Kipster birds in the outdoor access area, Photo credit: Kipster



## SUSTAINABILITY

Kipster also believes hens can play a crucial role in combating the significant food waste problem in the U.S. Up to 40% of human-grade food is wasted in the United States each year. While the priority is reducing waste, Kipster's hens offer another solution by transforming waste that people do not want to or cannot eat, into eggs and meat. Kipster's feed uses food waste and foodstuff such as by-products from crop processing and food manufacturing from wheat, corn, and soy. This allows Kipster to combat waste and use less land to raise animals. Kipster is also prioritizing lower greenhouse gas emissions by measuring, reducing, and emitting as little as possible through their innovative laying hen facilities. Kipster's novel feed blend has a footprint that is about half of conventional feed for laying hens. This number is significant because feed is responsible for around 70% of the greenhouse gas emissions of an egg.<sup>vi</sup> Kipster also uses solar panels on top of the barns to help power the farm and utilizes carbon credits to offset the remaining footprint of the egg. In the U.S., Kipster eggs are certified as CarbonNeutral® by Climate Impact Partners.

	KIPSTER	Organic	Pasture	Free-range	Cage-free	Caged
Committed to raising roosters	●	●	●	●	●	●
Beaks are kept intact	●	●	●	●	●	●
Carbon Offsetting	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hens can go outside	●	●	●	●	●	●
Indoor garden to roam	●	●	●	●	●	●
Daylight indoor	●	●	●	●	●	●
Up-cycled feed	●	●	●	●	●	●
Air scrubber for clean air	●	●	●	●	●	●
Minimum land use to grow feed	●	●	●	●	●	●
No yolk colorings added to feed	●	●	●	●	●	●
Curative anti-biotics	●	●	●	●	●	●
Catching birds 'Eyes On Animals'	●	●	●	●	●	●
Transparency as a core value	●	●	●	●	●	●
Exhibition for visitors	●	●	●	●	●	●

One unique aspect of Kipster's model is how they manage particulate matter from their farming operations. Particulate matter from laying hen operations includes dust, odor, ammonia, and other undesirable particles. The Kipster farm is the first in the United States to wash the air that leaves the barns. Before the air leaves the barn, its heat is recovered by a heat pump which preheats incoming fresh air. Combined with the innovative ventilation system in the barn this lowers emissions significantly and creates a better in-house climate for both the farmer and birds.



*Hens foraging for scattered food, Photo credit: Kipster*

## REDUCING RELIANCE ON ANIMALS

Beyond its high standards for animal welfare and sustainability, Kipster envisions a better model for farming with less animals. The Kipster team is dedicated to creating a world with fewer animal products. Kipster believes truly responsible farming means moving away from using animals altogether. Kipster has defined using farm animals only under certain strict conditions:

1. **Sustainable:** Farm animals ought to be an asset to a sustainable system, not a burden
2. **Natural behaviors:** Humans are obligated to honor the feelings and natural behaviors of farm animals by ensuring these animals can have fulfilling lives, as much as possible in a farm setting.
3. **Producing food:** The rivalry between humans and farm animals over food resources should never occur. Crop cultivation should focus on producing food for humans, not for animals

Kipster chickens are a solution to many of these issues, and the entire farm model at Kipster has been developed to offer a sustainable, higher welfare alternative.



*Hens using the aviary system, Photo credit: Kipster*



FARMER WELL-BEING

Kipster’s system is designed to offer a more fulfilling environment for the birds, and a better working environment for the farmers. The Farm Manager at Kipster USA, Shania Ray, shared her perspective and why she values the Kipster model over intensive caged systems:

*"I have always been really focused on animals. I like the heightened animal welfare at Kipster and that the chickens can display their natural behaviors. The space the birds are allowed gives them an opportunity for dustbathing or climbing on trees and logs. They can pick at straw and alfalfa bales. They forage on the ground after we spread feed in the indoor garden. Simply put – they get to be themselves. With the chickens being able to do so much more, I interact with my employees even more to discuss what they are seeing in the houses. They walk every day for routine checks, and they notice the chickens doing different things. It helps them get more excited about their job too. My employees will naturally – without even knowing – just sit there and watch the chickens."*

KIPSTER AT A GLANCE

Flock size	24,000 hens per house, divided up in 4 sections of 6,000 birds each. Total of 3 hen houses
Usable space per hen	Total living area for the birds without outdoor area is 1.61 sq. ft. per bird. Outdoor area is an additional 0.98 sq. ft. per bird. This is per hen house
Floor space per hen	1.16 square foot per bird indoors. Outdoor floor space is additional 0.98 sq. ft per bird
Aviary model	Big Dutchman Aviary System
Number of tiers in aviary & distribution of resources	<a href="#">NATURA® Step &amp; Step XL   True Aviary Systems   Multi-Tiered Aviaries</a>
Perch space per hen	0.5 ft per hen in aviary (not including perches as part of enrichments in indoor and outdoor gardens)
Types of enrichments	Enrichments are peck blocks, fake trees and branches to perch, perches in the aviary system, alfalfa and stray haybales, litter on ground to dust bath (the whole indoor space is covered in litter), feed pellets spread on the indoor garden’s floor
Pullet rearing system	Big Dutchman aviary system
Average eggs per hen	On average, 322 eggs per hen in 2023. <i>From 2023 impact report: 23,882,160 eggs from an average of 74,123 hens<sup>7</sup></i>
Average age of hens at slaughter	90 weeks when they are killed to make space for new hens

CIWF’S RECOMMENDATIONS

The Kipster model is a great alternative to conventional caged systems, but even to indoor-only cage-free models that may limit certain aspects of laying hen welfare. By prioritizing hen welfare, farmer well-being, and carbon-neutral egg production, Kipster is a model that benefits animals, people, and the planet. Compassion in World Farming applauds Kipster’s work. CIWF would like to see continued growth of Kipster’s model in the U.S. and new retail partnerships nationwide, so the public has greater access to Kipster eggs.

Unlike most U.S. egg producers, Kipster previously raised both male and female chicks, with the first few flocks of male chicks in the U.S. being grown as roosters for meat. However, there is a lack of suitable infrastructure to process the meat into products for the market. Kipster is continuing to work to find solutions for this.

*Hens using the aviary system, Photo credit: Kipster*



Moving forward, CIWF encourages Kipster to:

- Continue to work with new in-ovo technology providers to implement this practice in its U.S. operation as soon as possible. Kipster is aiming for adoption in mid-year 2025.
- Continue seeking solutions to raise and market roosters in the U.S. to drive systematic changes in the food system.
- Provide more cover outdoors to encourage birds to range and make use of the outdoor areas. Birds look for areas to retreat for protection from real or perceived predators, and Kipster uses netting to protect the birds from outdoors from predators. However, this outdoor range should incorporate more visually distinguishable items of natural and/or artificial cover, such as bushy trees, shrubs, cornstalks, shade cloth, or A-frame structures. If hens can see different areas of cover from the hen house, it will encourage more hens to venture outdoors. Ample cover allows the hens to retreat when real or perceived aerial predators are overhead (e.g., birds of prey or airplanes). Cover also gives hens shade from the sun and shelter from wind and rain outdoors.

CIWF is grateful for the continued collaboration with Kipster and is eager to see this production grow globally.

## REFERENCES

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