

The Chicken or the Egg?

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Meet the Farmers



Ryan and Desiree Nelson
Nelson Grass Farm
Ogilvie, MN

"My husband and I moved to our farm four years ago. Prior to that we managed a sheep farm for someone else. That was our first experience with farming. The farm life became more appealing as we learned more about farming. We liked doing it and wanted to produce the best product with our shared knowledge. Regenerative farming, and farming from the soil up inspired us to farm for the future."

The Chicken...

We love chicken for obvious reasons. It's safe, it's reliable, it can be cooked tons of ways, and it's delicious! But then there is that old joke, "Taste's like chicken!" Sometimes chicken becomes synonymous with generic. In a state that produces approximately 47 million chickens annually, the 50+ chicken farmers listed in the Minnesota Grown Directory work hard to set their products apart from the rest. For consumers purchasing direct from their local farmer, chicken will never be generic or boring. Local tastes better! But you don't have to take our word for it. Take it from the producers themselves – experts in the field. Read on to discover how Minnesota Grown producers of fresh, local eggs and meat chickens tend to their livestock and ensure their products are the best on the market. Then find your local producer in our online Directory today!

Ryan and Desiree Nelson, Nelson Grass Farm, specialize in pastured meat and eggs. Managing a sheep farm inspired them to farm, and the life grew more appealing as they learned more. Producing the best possible product they can with the knowledge they have is important to them! Inspired by regenerative farming and farming from the soil up, the Nelsons farm for the future.



Chickens on pasture, Nelson Grass Farm

This can be seen as we take a look at the way they raise their broiler chickens, meat chickens and layer chickens for eggs. "We are a pasture-based, seasonal farm," shares Desiree. "During Minnesota's growing season, our chickens are rotated out into our pastures. Our broiler chickens go on pasture at 3 weeks of age into a mobile open bottom pen that we move daily to fresh grass until they are butchered. Our layer chickens roost and lay their eggs in a mobile coop which has electric net fence around the coop. The layers have about 1/3 of an acre and we move them at least weekly to fresh grass. Our structures contain and protect our chickens while allowing them to be outside and gain more nutrition from the plants and insects. They also receive a transitional organic, no-soy grain feed which is mostly corn and field peas."

Why do the Nelsons pasture-raise their poultry? Aren't there easier ways to do it? "We farm with the soil in mind," says Desiree. Their animals spread their own manure, rejuvenating the microorganisms that live in the soil. This helps with production of plants as well. According to the Nelsons, "Our animals are higher in nutrition and this benefits us when we eat these nutrient-dense foods." The rotation of chickens on pasture is good for the soil too, so the Nelson's are committed to pasture farming!

Meat full of nutrients tastes better, and is better for you. Another factor that differing tastes may be attributed to? Varying breeds! Producers across the state raise a variety of chicken breeds. For instance, Mari Barranco of Love Thy Neighbor Farm raises White Cornish and Red Rock Rangers. She also processes them on the farm before selling direct to consumers.

We believe that some of the tastiest recipes *must* come from the chicken farmers themselves, and Mari shared a recipe from her own cookbook with us! Give it a try for a delicious take on baked chicken!

Mari's Baked Chicken Recipe

- 1 4-6 lb Cut-up Chicken from Love thy neighbor farm
- 4 Tbs Melted butter
- 1 Tbs Local honey
- 1 Tbs Chilli powder
- 1/2 Tsp Garlic powder
- 1/2 Tsp Onion powder
- 1/4 Tsp Turmeric powder
- 1/4 Tsp Curry powder (optional)
- 1/2 Tsp Sea or Himalayan salt (or to taste)

Preheat oven at 375 F. In a small bowl, mix all the spices with butter and honey. Wash and dry chicken and brush it with the mixture. Bake uncovered for 45 minutes or until juices run clear. Serve with brown rice or green beans or any vegetable!

Enjoy!

Recipe courtesy of Mari Barranco of Love Thy Neighbor Farm.

While we are on the topic of preparing your chicken, don't forget about food safety! Check out [these tips](#) from Minnesota's own, Gold n' Plump to properly store, thaw, transport, serve and handle chicken.

...or the egg?

While some producers strictly raise their chickens for meat production, many are also raising laying hens for egg production. Farming practices in many situations carry over to the laying hens as well. But there are some differences to keep in mind when producing animals for different purposes. Producers like Mari from

Meet the Farmers



Mari Barranco

Love Thy Neighbor Farm

Harris, MN

"Our favorite part of farming is the satisfaction of our customers, but we enjoy the whole process because we love to be outdoors and we love to see our animals growing healthy and happy! We cannot tell you how good it is to eat your own grown food too!"

"We encourage you to buy local so the money stays in your community. You help your neighbors and of course you get fresher food that has not been shipped long distances so it will be more nutritious!"

Meet the Farmers



Norman Gross
Earth Dance Farm
Spring Valley, MN

“It is a spiritual endeavor for me to grow and raise the food that goes onto the tables of families that I communicate with and know. Food from this land nourishes and sustains folks that live near me, and the money that they pay me to raise the produce is spent locally to support the livelihoods of others nearby. It makes good sense to me, so I will continue to talk to the chickens just as I remember my Dad doing.”

Love Thy Neighbor Farm say that, “Eggs taste better from June to September due to the availability of forage like insects, grass, clover and seeds.” But there are some not-so-easy-to-see factors that go into egg production too!

An “Eggcellent” choice!

As far as nutrition goes, eggs are hard to beat! What would we do without the egg? It’s a dietary staple, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and an important ingredient in sweet and savory dishes.

With so many ways to prepare eggs, it’s relieving to know they are also great for you! Alongside milk, eggs contain the highest value for protein. One egg is only 75 calories, but contains 7 grams of high-quality protein, 5 grams of fat, iron, vitamins, and minerals. Eggs are powerhouses for disease-fighting nutrients like lutein and zeaxanthin, which may reduce the risk of macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness in older adults. Plus, brain development and memory may be enhanced by the choline content of eggs!

Do eggs spoil?

We have found ourselves wondering the same – just how long does an egg last? Eggs should be stored properly – in the refrigerator – and cooked thoroughly to kill any potential bacteria before eating. Typically, once you get them home, you can keep eggs for up to 5 weeks from the purchase date. Farm fresh eggs may last even longer, so check with your producer!

Don’t remember when they were purchase? Use this handy tip of dropping one in a bowl of water to test it for freshness:

1. Place the egg in a bowl of water.
2. If the egg lays on its side at the bottom, it is still quite fresh.
3. If the eggs stands upright on the bottom, it is still fine to eat, but should be eaten soon or hard-boiled.
4. If the egg floats to the top, it is past its prime, and not good for eating.

Why does this method work? Eggshells are quite porous. Over extended periods of time, air passes through the shell and into the egg. An eggs shelf life diminishes as more air enters the shell. When too much air is inside, the egg become more buoyant, causing a spoiled egg to float. Crazy, right?!



Laying Hens, Earth Dance Farm

What’s light got to do with it?

Did you know that light affects egg production? Yep, it’s true! A chicken requires about 14 hours of sunlight to lay one egg. In Minnesota, once fall and winter arrive, that much sunlight can be unheard of. Take it from

the Nelsons. Ryan and Desiree raise their broiler chickens only during the warm months and keep their layers year-round. “Hens naturally drop in egg production during the cold winter months as they go through their molting period, laying at 50% or less during the dark days of winter and close to 80-90% during the summer,” says Desiree. That makes eggs seasonal! Producers do their best to spread available eggs to all of their customers through the winter months, but be sure to get yours early, as they can be in shorter supply!

For Mike Braucher of Braucher’s Sunshine Harvest Farm, production of eggs has been great this year! He says, “It’s probably the best it has been in recent years. Clean water, sunshine, room to roam, and good food all makes for happy, healthy animals and better production.”

Mike has been raising hens for as long as he can remember in order to provide his family and friends with eggs and meat. For Mike, it’s tradition. “My father and grandfather were also farmers,” he shares. “When we got started in farmers markets over 10 years ago we began to slowly build our production a little each year. We direct market to all of our consumers and we see 90% of our customers face to face.” That’s the beauty of buying direct from your farmer!



An Egg CSA?

Yes! Just like some members in the Minnesota Grown Directory offer shares for meat CSAs, you can purchase a share for an egg CSA! Take Earth Dance Farm for example.

“Particular to the laying hens we had on our farm, I have several lasting memories,” shares Norman Gross, of Earth Dance Farm, who began caring for chickens as a boy growing up on a small family farm in Iowa. There they had 200 laying hens and meat chickens. “When we would grind feed [for the chickens] I would be in charge of making sure the wagon was full but not spilling over from the grinder. I remember throwing feed over my face and neck so everyone knew how blasted hard I was working!” Norm recalls nostalgically.

Years of experience raising chickens alongside his family meant it was only natural to have chickens when they purchased their farm south of Rochester in 2005. Today Norm has around 350 chickens. They are raised on free access to his 42 acres and fed 100% organic feed, vegetable extras and alfalfa hay. Eggs from his laying hens go to members of his CSA during the summer season, and are sold to anyone during the fall, winter and spring months.

Norm shares, “I love the Community Supported Agriculture model where food is grown for the local community. It is so important that folks know where their food comes from, who grows their food, and know that they can visit this farm

Meet the Farmers



Michael Braucher
Braucher’s Sunshine Harvest Farm
Webster, MN

“My favorite part of farming is working with the animals every day. I also enjoy the satisfaction of providing great eggs and meat to my customers who come back to the market every week and tell me how much they enjoy my products, as well as getting artwork from children at the market showing me on my farm with my animals.

“People frequently ask, ‘Do you name your hens?’ The answer is yes, every single one! (:”

any time they want to. It is a spiritual endeavor for me to grow/raise food that goes onto the tables of families that I communicate with and know. Food from this land nourishes and sustains folks that live near me, and the money that they pay me to raise the produce is spent locally to support the livelihoods of others nearby. It makes good sense to me, so I will continue to talk to the chickens just as I remember my Dad doing.”

We love what Norm has to say about buying local. For Minnesota Grown members statewide, the love of supporting small business and local economy is shared. For us here at Minnesota Grown, we love to connect our members with consumers like you! So whichever you believe came first – the chicken or the egg – we can help you find the best-tasting versions right here in Minnesota! To learn more about chicken and egg production, it is best to talk directly to your farmer. To find a producer of high-quality, local chicken or eggs near you, search the Minnesota Grown Directory today!

A special “Thank You!” to members Nelson Grass Farm, Love Thy Neighbor Farm, Earth Dance Farm and Braucher’s Sunshine Harvest Farm for sharing their expertise on chicken and egg farming!



Chickens on pasture, Braucher’s Sunshine Harvest Farm