

Egg Prices - Why so High?

Anyone who has been to the grocery store lately or seen the grocery receipt is well aware of the rise of food prices. However, some increases are more dramatic than others with that carton of eggs being top of the list. During 2024, the average price of a dozen Grade A large eggs increased by 37 percent. Then in January, eggs increased an average of \$1.28 per dozen—another increase of over 22 percent-- in one month! When can we expect prices to improve? The answer to that question is, unfortunately, not any time soon. What is going on?



Rebekah Norman,
Extension Agent III

As is usually the case, answers can be complex and involve multiple factors. Inflation plays a role; since 2023 prices in general have been increasing. Supply chain issues continue to plague the table egg industry since the pandemic. Overall, the age-old economic principle of supply vs. demand is at work. Supply is low, demand remains somewhat the same, and that equals higher prices.

Why is supply low? The industry continues to struggle to find workers and suffers from a labor shortage which somewhat hampers production. However, the dominating factor of decreased egg supply is a decreased population of hens who lay the eggs. The culprit? Highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and in more particular, H5N1. This disease outbreak began in February 8, 2022 and as of this writing, 153.87 million birds have been affected. The deadly disease has been detected in a total of 1,513 flocks in all 50 states. Of these 710 have been commercial flocks and 803 have been backyard flocks. During December 2024 alone, 18.25 million birds were lost. The numbers from January of this year are even more grim—23.3 million birds gone.

Lost laying hens can be replaced; farmers and egg companies are working to do that as quickly as possible. Keep in mind the lifecycle of a chicken: 3 weeks from fertile egg to chick and 20-22 weeks for a chick to grow to an adult hen laying eggs. At first her eggs are small and not Grade A large quality. It takes several weeks for her to mature into larger eggs. All added together, it takes six months to raise a table egg layer and bring her into production. This translates to a continued period of high egg prices until these replacement birds can be brought into production; no quick fixes on the horizon.

Work is being done to develop a vaccine, but nothing is developed as of this time. This makes biosecurity vital. If you are a poultry owner, protect the health of your birds. Remember that HPAI is carried by migratory birds such as waterfowl, starlings, blackbirds and a host of other wild birds. This virus does not adversely impact the wild birds in the least, but it is deadly to poultry. This disease is highly contagious and lethal to poultry.

What can be done? As our Extension Poultry Specialist explains, the virus does not just appear in a flock; it must be put there. Take care to not carry the contagion into your poultry coops. The three components of a good biosecurity program include isolation, traffic control, and sanitation. All three must be in place to protect the flock. Change clothes before entering; wear footwear dedicated for inside-the-coop wear. Wild birds defecate as they fly overhead, so it is easy to step into the droppings and be unaware, carrying them to your flock. If visiting someone else's birds, shower and change clothes before entering your coop.

References

Dr. Tom Tabler, Extension Poultry Specialist, UT Extension and AgResearch

Trading Economics. 2025. Available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/commodity/eggs-us>. Accessed: February 5, 2025.

USDA. 2025. Food price outlook. Available at: [Food Price Outlook – Summary Findings | Economic Research Service](#). Accessed: February 5, 2025.

For more information on backyard bird biosecurity, please call your UT/TSU Extension office at 615-898-7710 office or visit our website at rutherford.tennessee.edu.