

Eggs Past and Present

name _____

Informational text (RI.4.1)



Robotic Packaging

Who Ate The First Egg?

People have been eating eggs for a very long time— about six million years! The first people to eat eggs took them from nests in the wild and ate the eggs raw. There is no way to know who ate the first egg. What researchers do know is people living in Egypt and China were the first to keep hens. It’s also believed that when Columbus returned to the New World in 1493, he had chickens on board. Historians suspect the chickens that lay the eggs we eat today are **descendants** of the chickens Columbus had on board.

The Early 1900s

The United States egg industry began as a backyard business. In the early 1900s, farmers raised laying hens to provide eggs for their families. Extra eggs were sold at local farmers’ markets. As the demand for eggs grew, farmers increased the size of their flocks. The farmers had more eggs to sell, but they had more problems, too. The hens were easy prey for **predators**. Fewer eggs were laid in bad weather. Sickness among the hens was also a factor. Researchers soon discovered that when hens were moved indoors, their health and egg laying improved. Many more improvements followed. Raised flooring meant hens no longer came into contact with their waste. Conveyor belts and egg washers were introduced. The result was healthier hens and more eggs.

The Early 1960s

By the early 1960s, the egg industry was shifting from small farm flocks to larger **commercial** operations. This was due to improved machinery and technology. Today robots are common in commercial operations. Robots move and pack the eggs, and they feed hens. The production of eggs has changed a lot over the years, but one thing has not. Healthy hens and quality eggs are very important to egg farmers.

Eggs Today

The U.S. population is steadily increasing. This means more eggs are needed. It’s estimated that the average American eats about 250 eggs each year. Thanks to a high-quality diet, improved genetics and healthier hens, egg farmers are meeting the demands.

There are many reasons eggs are so popular. Did you know there are more than 100 different ways to prepare eggs? Eggs are also used in many recipes. Eggs are **inexpensive** too, costing only about 17¢ each. And eggs are good for you. They are packed with high-quality protein. Eggs do contain cholesterol. However, recent medical research has found that the cholesterol in eggs does not increase the risk of heart disease in healthy individuals. To put it simply—eggs are eggceptional!

Write the Answer

- When the demand for eggs increased in the 1900s, what did farmers do? _____
- What are three problems early egg farmers faced? _____
- Write the bold word from the text for each meaning:
 - low cost _____
 - related to _____
 - animal hunters _____
 - money-making _____
- What is something about the egg industry that has not changed? _____
- Why are eggs a popular food choice? Give three reasons. _____



Answer Key

1. Farmers increased the size of their flocks.
2. sickness among hens, predators, bad weather
3. a. inexpensive c. predators
 b. descendants d. commercial
4. Healthy hens and quality eggs are still important to egg farmers.
5. Eggs are packed with protein, there are more than 100 ways to fix an egg and eggs are inexpensive.

