

NEWSELA

America has fewer eggs and they cost more after bird flu kills lots of hens

By Kansas City Star, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.23.15

Word Count **586**



Eggs are a popular item on the menu of Roxanne's Cafe in Parkville, Missouri, June 11, 2015, but egg prices for the restaurant have escalated enormously in the past month. Photo: Keith Myers/Kansas City Star/TNS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Three weeks ago, if you ordered three eggs at Roxanne's Cafe, you would probably get five eggs on your plate. Cooks did not count how many eggs they dropped into the frying pan. Owner Roxanne Gray gladly allowed it.

Today, Roxanne's is more strict. Three eggs means three eggs. There should be no more and no less, says Gray.

Supermarket Egg Prices Triple

"I have one cook that I can't control his egging. He's not allowed to cook any eggs right now," Gray said.

That is because egg prices for Roxanne's Cafe have gone up tremendously in the past month. On May 5, Gray paid \$17.55 per 15 dozen eggs. Last week, she paid \$42.85.

Roxanne's Cafe is not alone. Some supermarkets have seen prices of a dozen eggs more than triple, from 99 cents to \$3 in the past few weeks. The rising prices is caused by recent outbreaks of bird flu.

Jo Manhart is the head of the Missouri Egg Council. She called the bird flu outbreak one of the worst diseases to strike animals in America.

Millions Of Hens Lost

Farmers have lost 47 million hens and turkeys since the virus began spreading a few months ago. Iowa, the country's top egg-producing state, has been hit the hardest. More than 30 million hens have been affected.

In Kansas, the virus has hit only 10 birds in a backyard flock. Despite this, last week the Kansas Department of Agriculture banned chickens, turkeys and other live birds from state and county fairs in 2015. Officials are afraid the poultry will spread the virus.

The outbreaks have meant that there are less eggs. Last week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicted that 95.9 billion eggs will be laid this year, while nearly 100 billion eggs were produced last year.

Americans Were Eating More Eggs

The virus struck at a time when eggs were becoming pretty popular. Last year each person in America ate 263 eggs on average, the highest in 30 years.

Before the outbreak "eggs were on a roll," Kevin Burkum, an official with the American Egg Board. The group promotes eggs and egg farmers.

Roxanne's, probably like many cafes, is trying to make up for high egg prices. Gray changed the daily specials to include meals that do not include eggs. She has not offered lemon meringue pie in two weeks. The pie is made with a lot of eggs.

Gray hates the thought of raising menu prices.

Before the outbreak, farmers were paid 63 cents for a dozen eggs. The price is now \$2.35, according to Brian Moscogiuri. He writes for a food industry newspaper.

Makeup And Shampoo Use Eggs Too

Supermarkets are also struggling with the high egg prices.

"Egg supplies are steadily decreasing to alarming levels," the egg association said in a statement. "The US egg market is struggling to fulfill demand needs for other food producers."

Bakeries, for example, use eggs to make bakery items and ice cream. Other products are made with eggs, as well, like marshmallows, mayonnaise, makeup and shampoo.

The Hen House grocery chain said it is paying a lot more for eggs. It has had to start charging shoppers more.

No one completely knows how chickens caught the virus from wild birds. Some of it was through physical contact such as bird droppings. The director of the Egg Industry Center at Iowa State University thinks that the virus can also travel through the air and seep into cracks of chicken barns.

Some people hope the deaths of so many chicken will heighten peoples concern about the conditions that chickens are being raised in to produce cheap eggs.

Some believe that short supplies of chicken eggs and higher prices will continue for months or even longer. Replacing enough chickens to replace the dead chickens may take six months to two years.

The good news is that heat kills the virus. Outbreaks are expected to slow down in the summer. Hopefully by fall, scientists will learn enough to stop the outbreaks.

Eggs get scarcer, more expensive after bird flu kills millions of U.S. hens

By Kansas City Star, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.23.15

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Eggs are a popular item on the menu of Roxanne's Cafe in Parkville, Missouri, June 11, 2015, but egg prices for the restaurant have escalated enormously in the past month. Photo: Keith Myers/Kansas City Star/TNS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Three weeks ago, if you ordered a three-egg omelet from Roxanne's Cafe, you would probably get a five-egg omelet instead. Cooks didn't pay much attention to how many eggs they dropped into the frying pan. And owner Roxanne Gray gladly allowed it.

Today, Roxanne's is more strict. A three-egg omelet means three eggs. No more, no less.

Eggs Cost HOW Much?

"I have one cook that I can't control his egging. He's not allowed to cook any eggs right now," Gray said. She told him to make two scrambled eggs for her, "and he probably had six eggs in the pan."

That's because egg prices for Roxanne's Cafe have risen enormously in the past month. On May 5, Gray paid \$17.55 per 15 dozen eggs, while last week, she paid \$42.85.

Roxanne's Cafe is not alone. Some supermarkets have seen prices of a dozen eggs grow from 99 cents to \$3 in the past few weeks. Everyone is feeling the pain from recent outbreaks of bird flu, or avian influenza, spreading through the Midwest.

Joe Manhart is the executive director of the Missouri Egg Council. She called the bird flu outbreak "the most devastating foreign animal disease" in America.

Bird Flu Killed Millions Of Hens

Farmers have lost 47 million hens and turkeys since the virus began spreading a few months ago. Iowa, the country's top egg-producing state, has been hit the hardest. More than 30 million hens have been affected.

More than 53,000 birds in Missouri and 40,000 birds in Arkansas have caught the bird flu. In Kansas, the virus has hit only 10 birds in a backyard flock. Despite this, last week the Kansas Department of Agriculture banned chickens, turkeys and other live birds from state and county fairs in 2015 for fear of spreading the virus.

The outbreaks have meant that farms have cut egg production. Last week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicted that 95.9 billion eggs will be laid this year, in contrast to the nearly 100 billion eggs produced last year.

The virus struck at a time when eggs were pretty popular. Last year each person ate 263 eggs on average, a 30-year high.

"Prior to this outbreak, eggs were on a roll," Kevin Burkum, an official with the American Egg Board.

How About Some Catfish?

Roxanne's, probably like many cafes, is trying to make up for high egg prices. Gray changed the daily specials to include meals, like catfish, that don't include eggs. She hasn't offered egg-rich lemon meringue pie in two weeks.

Gray hates the thought of raising menu prices.

Before the outbreak, the wholesale price of a dozen eggs was 63 cents. That has almost quadrupled to \$2.35, according to Brian Moscogiuri, a reporter for a food industry publication.

Besides restaurants and bakeries, supermarkets are also struggle with the high egg prices.

"Egg supplies are steadily decreasing to alarming levels," the egg association said in a statement. "The US egg market is struggling to fulfill demand needs for other food producers."

Bakeries, for example, use eggs to make bakery items and ice cream. Other products are made with eggs, as well, like marshmallows, mayonnaise, makeup and shampoo.

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The good news is that heat kills the virus. Outbreaks are expected to slow down in the summer. Hopefully by fall, scientists will learn enough to stop the outbreaks.

Economics Vocabulary

Consumer	<i>* Someone who buys a product (i.e. food, clothing, services).</i>
Demand	<i>* How much people want a particular product and are willing to pay for it.</i>
Price	<i>* The amount of money that must be spent to purchase a certain product (i.e. food, clothing, services).</i>
Producer	<i>* A person who makes a product (i.e. food, clothing, services).</i>
Supply	<i>* The amount of a product (i.e. food, clothing services) that is available for people to purchase.</i>
Product	<i>* Something that is produced and sold in large quantities.</i>

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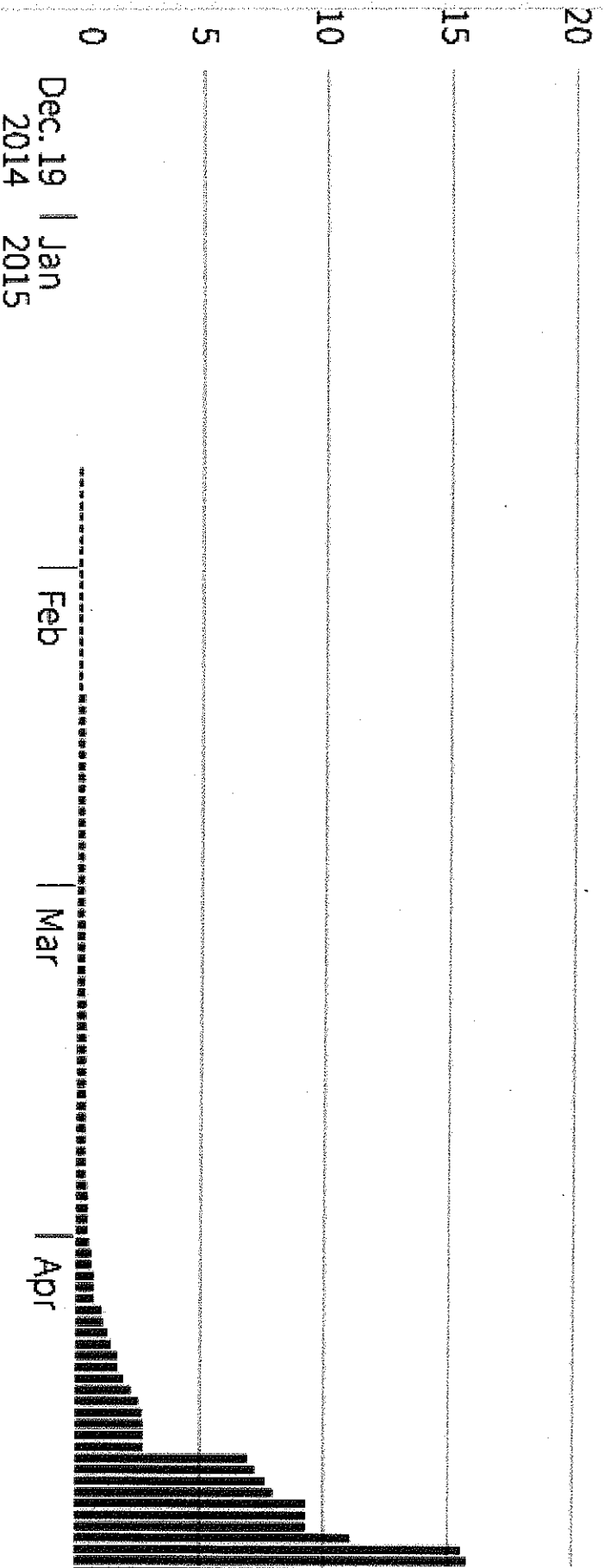
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U.S. bird flu outbreak

CUMULATIVE AFFECTED FLOCK SIZE BY DAY

Million birds



Note: Includes probable cases in Iowa for Apr. 30; excludes cases where estimated flock size is pending.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture; Iowa Department of Agriculture

C. Chan, 30/04/2015