

NATURE'S YOKE: *Eggs the Way Nature Intended*

When nature works together, things work well. This is the motto of Nature's Yoke, a company dedicated to supplying cage-free eggs from farms in Amish Country (New Holland, Pennsylvania) to stores along the east coast. The company believes that when chickens are fed quality feed and raised in a natural environment, they produce high-quality eggs that preserve farm freshness.

George Weaver III represents the third generation of his family to be in the shell egg business. His grandfather, George Weaver Sr., developed an egg business on his family's farm almost 50 years ago. In 1962, Weaver began selling his eggs directly to supermarkets in neighboring cities. Eventually he began working with other local farmers to sell their eggs to retailers as well.

The company switched to a cage-free environment and achieved organic certification in 1994, meaning that the eggs would carry a paper trail from the farm to the carton verifying organic procedures. As partnerships with local farmers flourished, guidelines were set in place to ensure all of the chickens and their eggs met the same standards. Pennsylvania Certified Organic monitors and certifies Nature's Yoke's eggs, evaluating everything from the chickens' feed to the details of the processing procedure.

Nature's Yoke chickens nosh on all-natural feed and freely roam the barn or outdoor pastures. The company maintains the belief that exercise and fresh air stimulate the animals' immune systems to fight off illness, so their chickens are never given antibiotics.

The chickens are trained to lay their eggs in nests in the hen house, so after a long day of exercise, they head back to the nest when they are ready to lay. Most chickens lay an egg a day, which ensures that the company can keep up with the demand for their natural and organic products.

Nature's Yoke operates three types of farms: cage-free, where the chickens eat vegetarian feed; certified organic, in which chickens feed on non-GMO organic grain; and free-range/pastured, where the chickens are grass-fed. The company's product line includes eggs that are cage-free and organic, cage-free and omega-3, cage-free fertile, cage-free brown, and cage-free white in medium, large, extra-large, and jumbo sizes.

The company's omega-3 eggs are laid by chickens given feed with flax meal, yielding eggs that boast 225 milligrams of omega-3



Words by Jennifer D. Harris (see page 6). Photo courtesy of Nature's Yoke.

per egg. Fertile eggs come from farms where hens and roosters are housed together. Some customers feel these eggs have greater health benefits and a different hormone make up. Eggs are collected weekly from the company's pool of 50 local farms with an average of 30-60 acres each. The farmers gather the eggs several times a day, after which they are stored in a cooler, washed, hand packed, and shipped to multiple distributors along the east coast. From start to finish, this process takes five to ten days. Nature's Yoke's eggs have a shelf life of 30 days.

Priced competitively when compared to other cage-free egg companies, Nature's Yoke's products do typically cost more than companies producing both cage-free and regular eggs. Because Nature's Yoke specializes in producing only cage-free eggs, the company's overhead costs are higher.

The company has steadily grown their distribution along the east coast. Their products can be purchased at a competitive price in Connecticut, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, with plans to move down the coast to Florida.

Nature's Yoke takes pride in producing safe eggs that customers can enjoy eating themselves as well as serving to others. "These eggs taste like eggs [I ate] when I was a kid - full-flavored with very rich, yellow yolks," says a Nature's Yoke taster who themselves grew up on a farm. "I haven't seen anything in the marketplace to date that matches the quality of these eggs." 