

*In my opinion, there are many welfare advantages to allowing poultry access to free range. Free range gives poultry access to an environment that is continuously stimulating, as vegetation grows and weather changes. This provides a richness in their environment that is impossible to duplicate indoors. In the wild, jungle-fowl and laying hens spend 60-70% of their time foraging for food, and an outdoor environment would allow domestic poultry to engage in this natural behaviour. Moreover, birds outside will consume an interesting variety of leafy material, seeds and grains and also invertebrates. They will also consume insoluble gritty material which will be retained in their gizzards and help on the digestion of seeds and grains. The free range should have good vegetative ground cover and also have bushes or trees to give the birds shade, shelter and cover from aerial predators. Birds can benefit from access to the outdoors once they are several weeks old and able to regulate their temperatures. Of course there are some disadvantages associated with free range but these can all be managed. The range should be surrounded by a fence to keep out ground predators and covered by netting to keep out aerial predators. In case of inclement weather, it is important that birds have easy access to a barn. There is a small risk of infection by certain avian viruses from wild bird populations particularly if the range lies on the migration path of wild birds. In parts of the country that have severe winters, birds may have to be confined to the barn for several weeks at a time. Therefore the barn should provide as rich an environment as possible.*

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