

Cloudy egg whites mean fresher product

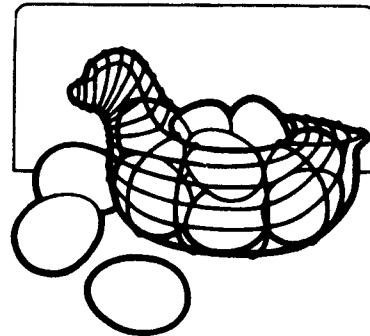
ITHACA, NY — You crack open an egg as you have dozens, even thousands of times before. This time, though, something's different: the egg white is all cloudy. Is it spoiled? Contaminated? Old?

"It's nothing of the sort! In fact, when the egg white is milky in color, it means that the egg is fresher than ever," says Robert Baker, professor of poultry and avian sciences at Cornell University.

In the past, when egg farms were smaller and pic-ups for market occurred less often, eggs didn't reach consumers until they were about ten days old. Today, farms are tremendous in size and eggs are delivered to market almost

daily. "It's often possible for eggs to reach the supermarket when they're only one day old," Baker explains.

As a result, the egg white, or albumen, still has a large amount



of free carbon dioxide in it, as it did when the egg was laid. This harmless gas causes the albumen to appear cloudy or milky in color. Other than looking a little different and being a little harder to peel if hard-boiled, the eggs with cloudy whites are in no other way different.

The difference in color, however, has been alarming consumers who are not used to seeing a thicker, milky-colored egg white because they're not used to having such fresh eggs, Baker says.

An egg breathes once it is laid, giving off carbon dioxide just as animals give off carbon dioxide as a by-product of respiration. As the gas leaves the egg, the albumen eventually becomes clear and thinner in consistency. If eggs are refrigerated, respiration is slowed and the cloudiness may remain for several days, Baker points out. If left out at room temperature, the eggs will respire more quickly and the egg white will become clear within hours.

Baker evaluated 23 different strains of laying hens to determine if there were any differences in the carbon dioxide content or the appearance of their egg whites. Comparing the color of fresh egg whites to the color of diluted skim milk, he rated the cloudiness of different kinds of eggs.

"We found that the degree of cloudiness of albumen differs by strain and by individual birds. Some strains of layers produce eggs with more carbon dioxide and therefore their egg whites appear more milky than other strains. "Some hens of the same strain, however, produce eggs with more carbon dioxide than others," Baker found.

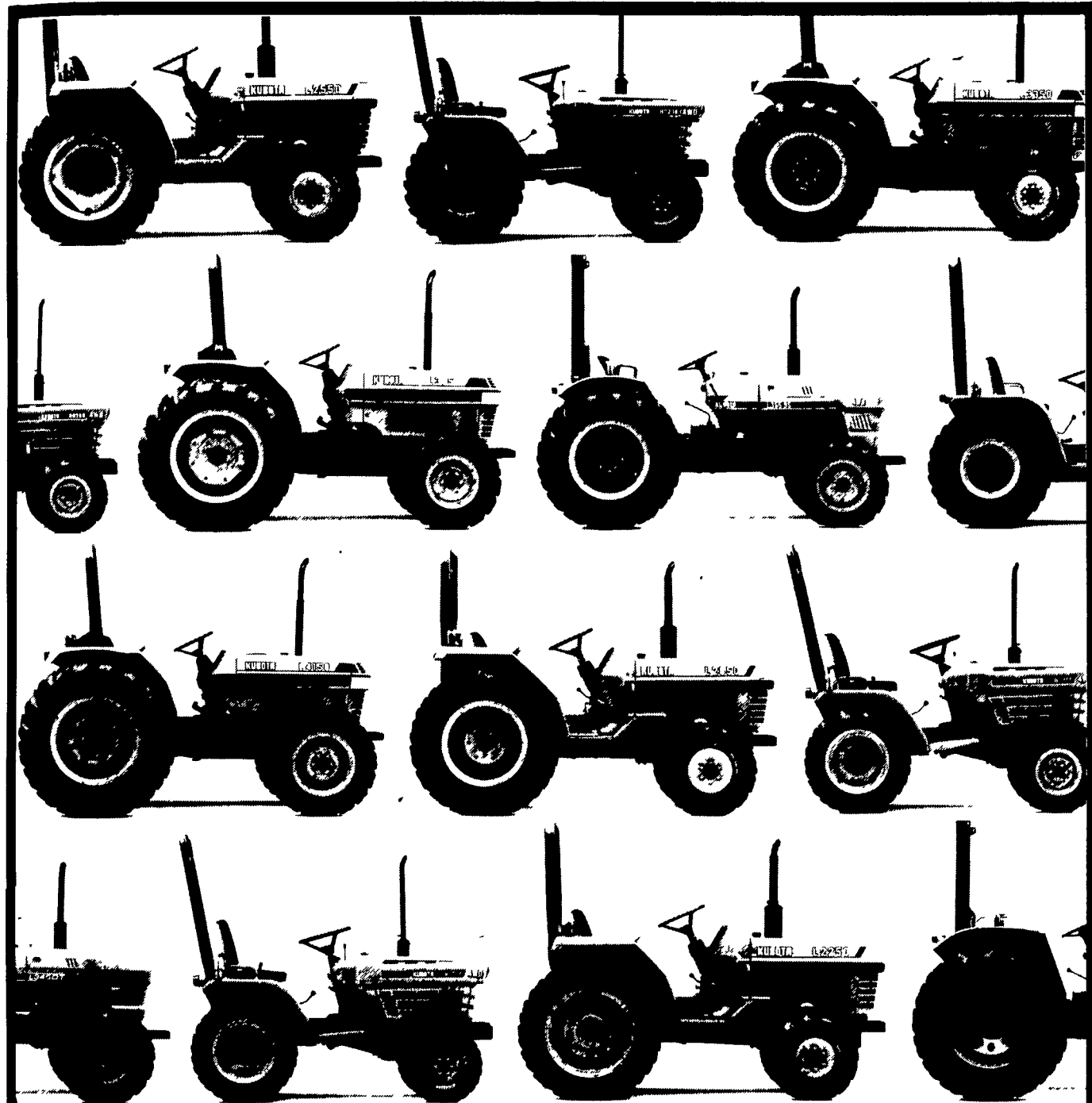
By trapping the egg's carbon dioxide inside the eggshell, the respiration of an egg can be slowed down and its freshness maintained, Baker points out. In fact, many producers use the harmless procedure of spraying their eggs with a colorless, odorless, tasteless mineral oil to plug the pores, thereby preventing the gas from escaping.

Almost all American consumers refrigerate their eggs, thereby maintaining the fresh quality of eggs for a long time. When eggs are shipped overseas to countries where refrigeration is scarce, however, they are sometimes put in non-breathing cartons to keep the carbon dioxide in to help preserve the eggs at room temperature for several months.

Sometimes, egg whites may stay cloudy or even become cloudy in the refrigerator because they may absorb carbon dioxide that is being released by other fresh foods as they respire. There is no harm if this occurs. In fact, the absorption of carbon dioxide will help maintain the quality of eggs.

So the next time you crack an egg and you see that the albumen is milky or cloudy, don't be concerned. "It's just an indication of a really fresh egg," Baker says.

What if you want to hard-boil such a fresh egg? "Let it remain at room temperature for several hours or overnight and the carbon dioxide will escape, leaving you with an easy-to-peel egg," says the Cornell expert.



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