

Mexico scrambles to cope with egg shortage

August 24 2012, by MICHAEL WEISSENSTEIN



A city worker sells eggs at government subsidized prices as people line up outside the city truck in Mexico City, Friday, Aug. 24, 2012. The Mexican government is battling an egg shortage and hoarding that have caused prices to spike in a country with the highest per-capita egg consumption on earth. About 11 million chickens were slaughtered after a June outbreak of bird flu. (AP Photo/Alexandre Meneghini)

(AP)—The Mexican government is battling an egg shortage and hoarding that have caused prices to spike in a country with the highest per-capita egg consumption on Earth.

A summer epidemic of bird flu in the heart of Mexico's egg industry has doubled the cost of a kilo (2.2 pounds), or about 13 eggs, to more than 40 pesos (\$3), a major blow to working- and middle-class consumers in a country that consumes more than 350 eggs per person each year. That's 100 more eggs per person than in the United States.

Egg prices have dominated the headlines here for a week, spurring Mexico City's mayor to ship tons of cheap eggs to poor neighborhoods and the federal government to announce emergency programs to get fresh chickens to farms hit by bird flu and to restock supermarket shelves with eggs imported from the U.S. and Central America.

The national dismay over egg prices has revealed the unappreciated importance of a cheap, easy source of protein that's nearly as important to Mexican kitchens as tortillas, rice and beans. Added boiled to stewed chicken, raw to a fruit-juice hangover cure and in every other conceivable form to hundreds of other foods, the once-ubiquitous egg has disappeared from many street-side food stands and middle-class kitchens in recent days.

"Eggs, as you know, are one of Mexicans' most important foods and make up a core part of their diet, especially in the poorest regions of the country," President Felipe Calderon said Friday as he announced about \$227 million in emergency financing and commercial measures to restore production and replace about 11 million chickens slaughtered after the June outbreak of bird flu.

Calderon said he was sending inspectors to stop speculation that he blamed for high egg prices, which have almost single-handedly driven up the national rate of inflation.



People line up outside a large city truck to buy eggs at government subsidized prices in Mexico City, Friday, Aug. 24, 2012. The Mexican government is battling an egg shortage and hoarding that have caused prices to spike in a country with the highest per-capita egg consumption on earth. About 11 million chickens were slaughtered after a June outbreak of bird flu. (AP Photo/Alexandre Meneghini)

He said that the government had already begun large-scale importation of eggs and that about 3 million hens were being sent to farms hit by the flu outbreak.

The Mexico City government has sent a refrigerated trailer-truck of eggs into working-class neighborhoods over the last three days, selling kilo packets for less than half the current market price. Several thousand people lined up for about two hours Friday morning to buy eggs from the truck in southeastern Mexico City's Iztacalco neighborhood.

Isidro Vasquez Gonzalez, an unemployed 43-year-old cook, waited with his niece and nephew to buy three kilos of eggs that they said they would eat almost immediately in a lunch of meatballs with chopped eggs.

"You can make eggs with anything—scrambled eggs, with pork rinds, eggs with beans, green chiles, poached eggs, green beans with eggs, eggs with tomato sauce," Vazquez said, with a wistful look in his eyes.

"People here eat a lot of eggs. They were the cheapest, but now they're the most expensive. They're more expensive than meat."

The crisis began with the June detection of bird flu in the western state of Michoacan, which produces roughly half of Mexico's eggs. Some 11 million birds were killed to prevent the spread of the disease, sharply cutting into the national supply of more than 2 million tons of eggs a year.

Government officials blame speculators in the wholesale egg business for driving up prices beyond the hike resulting from bird flu.

After existing stocks of eggs ran out, prices rose sharply in August.

"Eggs are what we eat the most these days," said Gertrudis Rodriguez, 68. But with the higher prices, she said, "if we eat beans, we don't eat eggs, or if we eat eggs, we don't eat beans with them."

Mexico City's public Food Supply Center, which provides government-subsidized fresh food to low-income residents, dropped other ingredients from its truck this week in favor of eggs, and will distribute 18 tons by the time its current stocks run out Monday, director-general Raymundo Collins said.

Calderon said more than 150 tons of eggs had already crossed the border from the U.S. and 100 trailers carrying 500 more tons would arrive in

the country over the weekend.

"The federal government will keep using every tool in its power to keep family's quality of life from being eroded by unfair increases in the price of eggs," the president said.

Copyright 2012 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Mexico scrambles to cope with egg shortage (2012, August 24) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-08-mexico-scrambles-egg-shortage.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.