Vet says free-range chickens not healthier than caged

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By Meatingplace Editors on 9/11/2014

Free-range chickens are more likely to catch disease, get injured and die earlier than their caged counterparts, according to media reports quoting prominent Scottish veterinarians who spoke recently at the British Science Festival.

Chickens that roam free live a life of peril because they have not been bred to survive an outdoor life, said Dr. Barry Thorp of the Royal School of Veterinary Studies in Edinburgh.

“I think that for long-term sustainability, free-range systems do not work,” *The Independent* newspaper quoted him as saying.

He also warned that a greater number of free-range chickens raises the risk of a major epidemic of bird flu in the United Kingdom as the disease could spread between chickens in fields and ducks in nearby rivers.

The [*Daily Mail*](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2749987/Free-range-hens-healthy-Chickens-likely-catch-disease-injured-die-early-kept-cages.html) quoted Dr. Victoria Sandilands of Scotland’s Rural College as saying that free-range birds have a mortality rate of 8 to 10 percent – above the death rate of 2 to 4 percent for caged hens – and free-range hens are twice as likely to have fractured bones than those kept in cages.