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# Disinformation on Aisle One:

Ahold Delhaize Customers  
are Misled by Egg Cartons

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June 2024

# Disinformation on Aisle One: Ahold Delhaize Customers are Misled by Egg Cartons

## Introduction

With concerns about food safety, quality, and animal treatment on the rise in the U.S., the shift toward cage-free egg production has rapidly accelerated over the last decade. According to USDA data, the percentage of hens raised in cage-free systems has grown from just about 9.6% in 2012 to over [40% in 2024](#). Driven by state laws and corporate purchasing policies, this figure is projected to possibly reach [75%](#) by 2025.

Companies like McDonald's and Costco are at the forefront of this shift, with McDonald's having achieved 100% cage-free eggs in 2023 and over 90% of Costco's eggs being cage-free; [hundreds](#) of others have also achieved, or are on the way to reaching, their goals too.

Additionally, [10 states](#) — from deeply blue states like [California](#) and [Massachusetts](#) to a deeply red one like Utah — have passed laws banning the production (and, in most cases, the sale) of eggs from caged chickens.

Confined to “[battery cages](#),” chickens spend their lives crammed into spaces roughly the size of a microwave, preventing them from engaging in critical natural behaviors such as dust bathing, perching, and nest laying. The shift toward cage-free egg production reflects broader [societal and consumer shifts](#) in attitudes toward animal welfare and sustainable farming practices. But indeed, animal welfare doesn't just impact animals — it also impacts the products people eat.

For example, the Center for Food Safety [says](#), “Animal welfare and food safety are intrinsically linked, which makes sense: sick animals produce sick food.” It continues: “Confining animals indoor and packing them into dense living conditions creates a number of serious hazards for animal welfare. Animals often live among their own waste and carcasses ... This crowded, toxic environment is conducive to virulent strains of bacteria.” Such confinement, it concludes, is simply not an “intelligent way to produce our nation's ... animal products.”

And a 2023 [study](#) conducted by the Prestage Department of Poultry Science at North Carolina State University that evaluated physical egg quality parameters of commercial hens housed in cage and cage-free systems found that “housing environment had a highly significant effect on most physical egg quality parameters” and that caged hens “produce the worst-quality eggs according to consumer and industry preferences.”

The trajectory away from caging chickens is perhaps unsurprising, with the practice having drawn public and regulatory scrutiny for decades.

The public's increasing awareness of these conditions, spurred by extensive media coverage and [undercover exposés](#), has ignited significant corporate and legislative actions. This evolution in egg production from restrictive caging systems to more humane, cage-free environments not only reflects a shift in production practices but also underscores a broader societal move toward more ethical and sustainable agricultural practices in the United States.

## **Ahold Delhaize**

In 2020, Ahold Delhaize, which owns large grocery store chains across the eastern U.S. (including Food Lion and Giant), [announced](#) a commitment to exclusively sell cage-free eggs by 2025 or sooner.

The company [stated](#) in 2023 that “we believe supporting animal welfare is the right thing to do.” It also expressed an understanding that “farm animal welfare is connected to food safety, due to the close links between space provided to animals and their health. Higher stocking densities require a higher usage of antimicrobials to keep the animals healthy, which may lead to antibiotic-resistant pathogens for humans.”

However, in that [report](#), the company also stated that “we do not expect to achieve our ambition of 100% cage-free eggs in 2025. The rate of supplier transition in some regions is slower than expected, and we want our brands to continue to be able to offer customers healthy and affordable protein options. Our plan and targets will be updated in 2024.”

Given Ahold Delhaize's strategy shift, Data for Progress set out to explore how the company's customers feel about this topic. To that end, Data for Progress [conducted a survey](#) from May 9 to 16, 2024 of 694 Ahold Delhaize customers throughout the company's various banners. The critical findings include: 1) customers are misled into thinking egg cartons sold at Ahold Delhaize containing eggs from caged chickens are cage-free; 2) customers overwhelmingly support clear, color-coded markers identifying which eggs come from caged chickens; 3) customers are more likely to buy the company's private label eggs if those eggs were exclusively cage-free; and 4) customers **do indeed** express strong preferences about the treatment of chickens from which eggs are sourced.

The full details of the polling are in the report below.

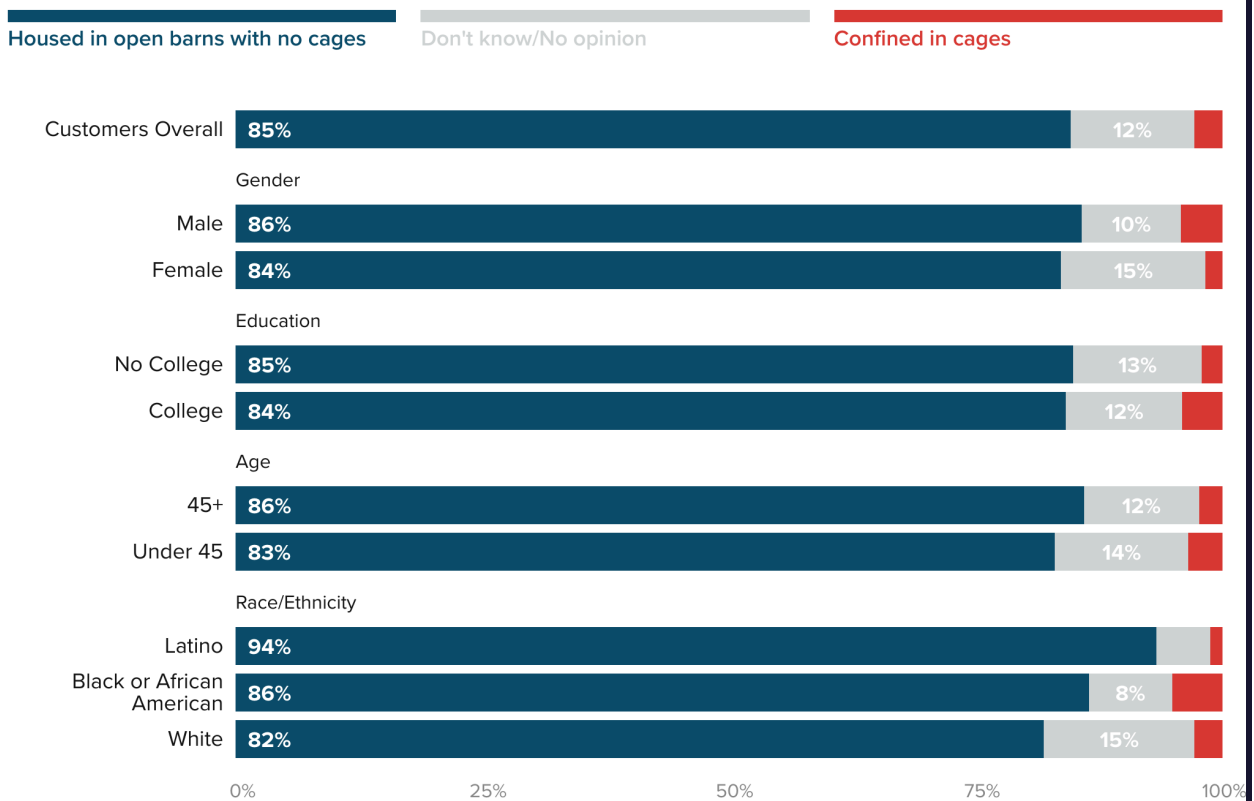
## Ahold Delhaize Customers Favor Housing Chickens in Cage-Free Barns Over Housing Them Inside Cages

When asked whether they think chickens should be confined in cages or housed in open barns with no cages, Ahold Delhaize shoppers overwhelmingly favor the latter approach. Eighty-five percent of customers overall, and at least 82% of customers across age, gender, education, and race and ethnicity, say chickens should be housed in open barns with no cages.

### Ahold Delhaize Customers Overwhelmingly Prefer Chickens Be Housed in Open Barns

Some eggs in grocery stores come from chickens confined in cages. These chickens spend their entire lives in small cages. Other eggs come from chickens housed in open barns where they can walk and stretch their wings.

Would you rather chickens be confined in cages or housed in open barns with no cages?



May 9–16, 2024 survey of 694 Ahold Delhaize customers

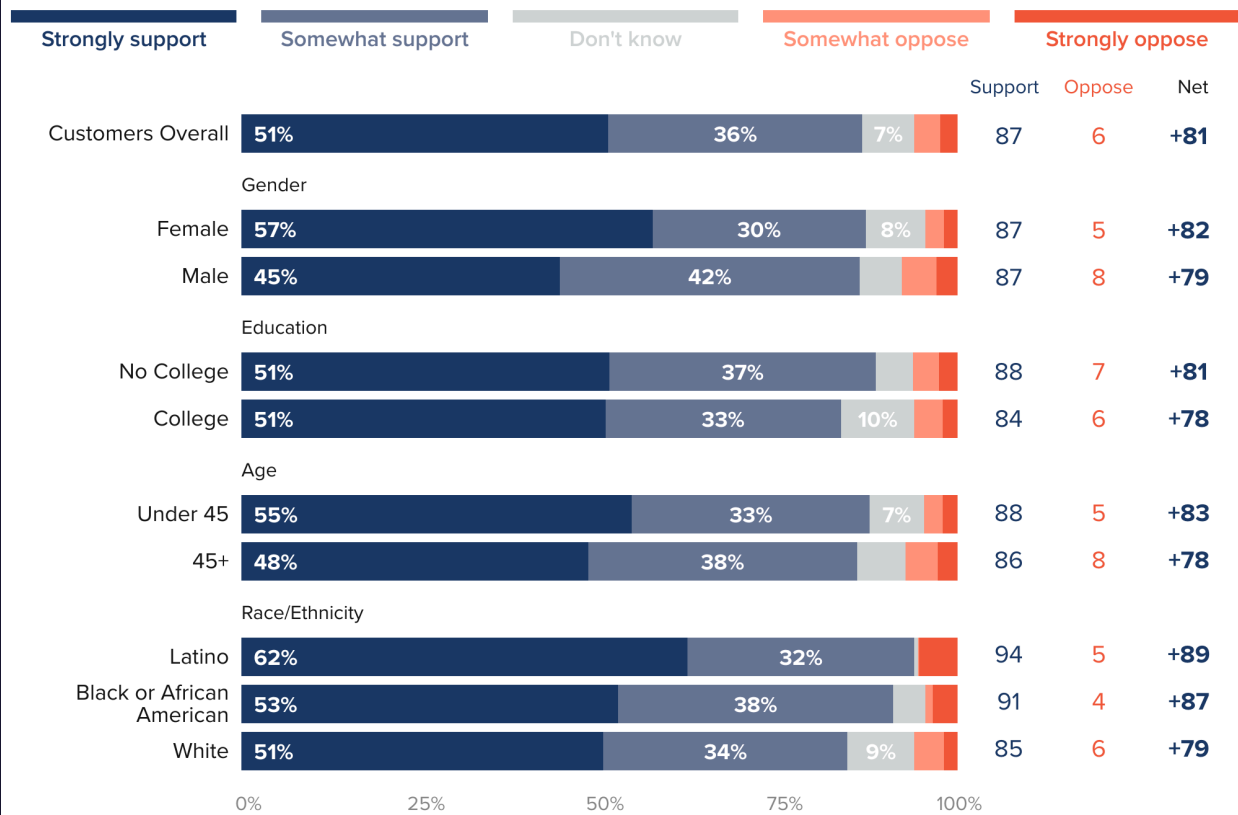
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Furthermore, when informed about commitments made by grocery stores to sell cage-free eggs, and asked if they would support or oppose their grocery store doing the same, 87% of customers respond in the affirmative. This includes at least 84% of respondents across age, education, gender, and race and ethnicity.

## Customers Overwhelmingly Support Their Grocer Committing to Sell Eggs Produced by Non-Caged Hens

Many grocery stores have promised better treatment of the chickens they source eggs from, including eliminating the confinement of these animals in small cages.

Would you support or oppose your grocery store promising to **only** sell eggs that came from chickens **not** confined in cages?



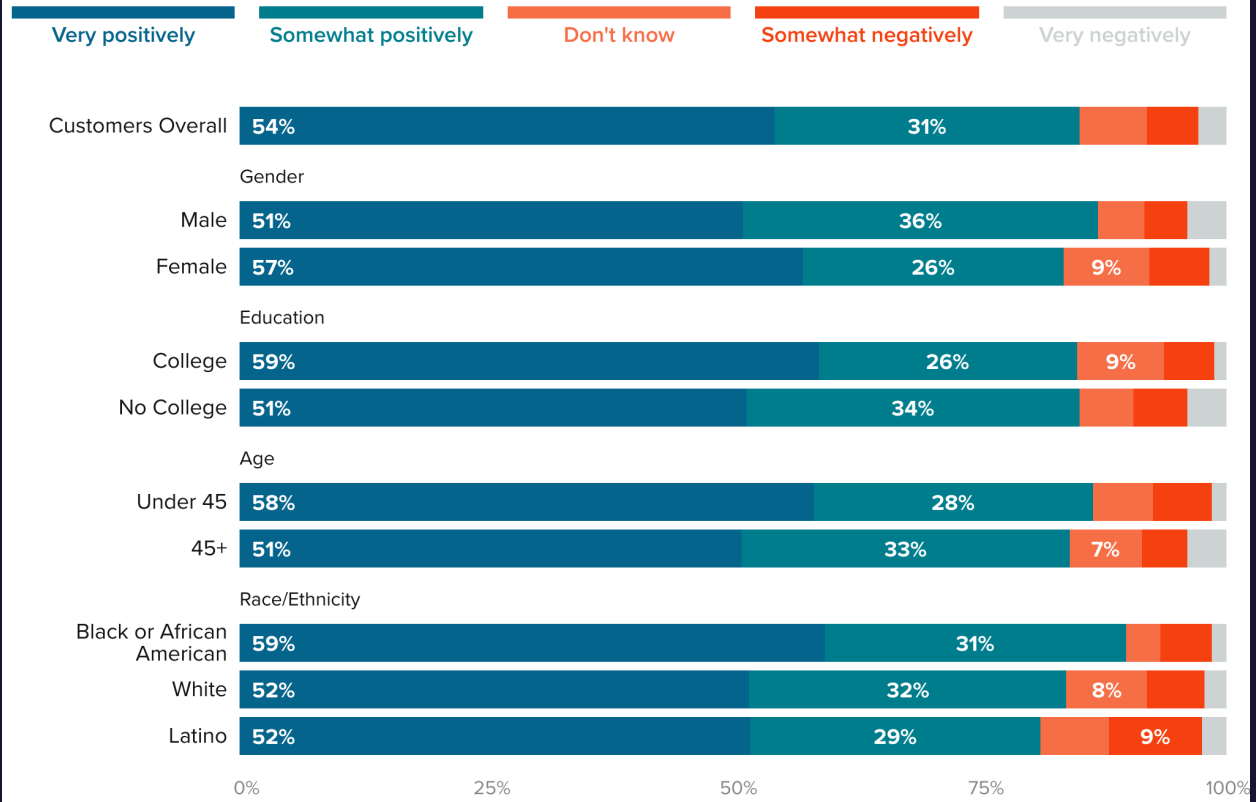
May 9–16, 2024 survey of 694 Ahold Delhaize customers

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Therefore, it is unsurprising that 85% of Ahold Delhaize customers say they would **very** positively (54%) or **somewhat** positively (31%) view their grocery store for committing to cage-free eggs.

## A Strong Majority of Ahold Delhaize Customers Would Positively View Their Grocer for Committing to Cage-Free Eggs

How positively or negatively would you view your grocery store if it followed through with a commitment to only sell eggs from chickens **not** confined in cages?



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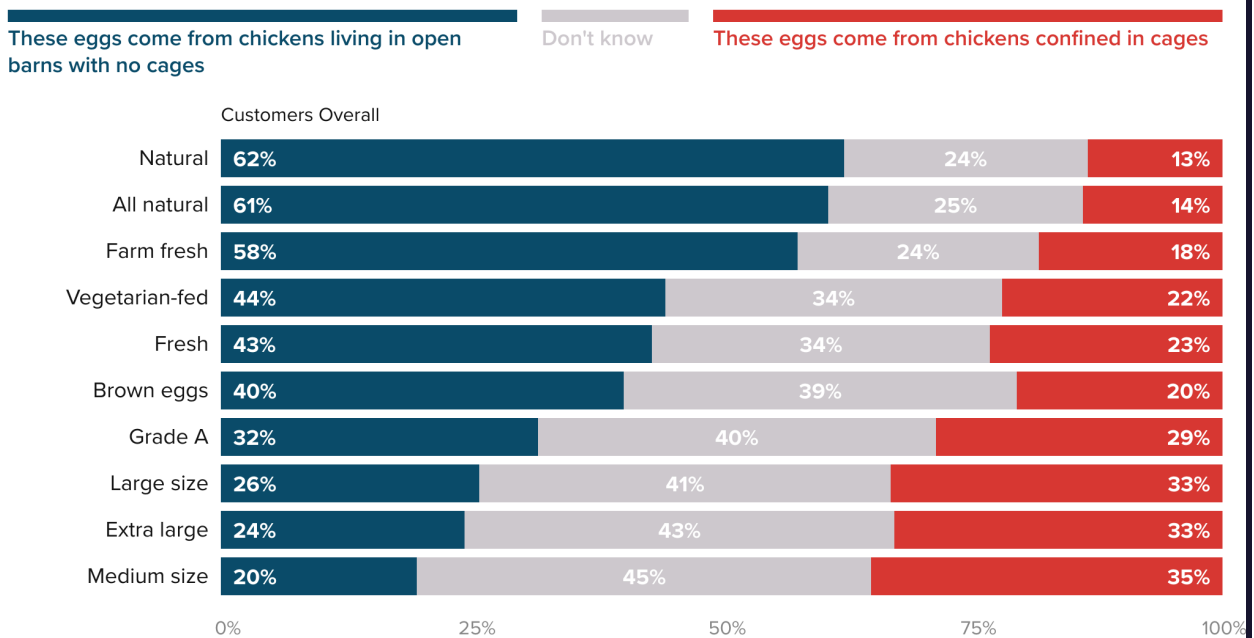
## Ahold Delhaize Customers Are Confused by Existing Egg Carton Labels and Marketing and Misled Into Inaccurately Identifying Egg Labels as Meaning Cage-Free

Despite this strong preference for raising hens cage-free, Ahold Delhaize customers are misled by existing egg carton labeling and marketing.

In an in-survey experiment, customers were provided with different labels commonly found on egg cartons carried in Ahold Delhaize grocery stores and asked whether they think eggs carrying these labels come from chickens confined in cages or chickens not confined in cages (or don't know). The results found that most shoppers incorrectly link labels to cage-free chickens when that is not the case.

### Egg Carton Labels at Ahold Delhaize Stores Cause Customers to Inaccurately Identify Them as Meaning Cage-Free

For each of the following types of eggs, please tell us whether you think the chickens are confined in cages or housed in open barns with no cages:



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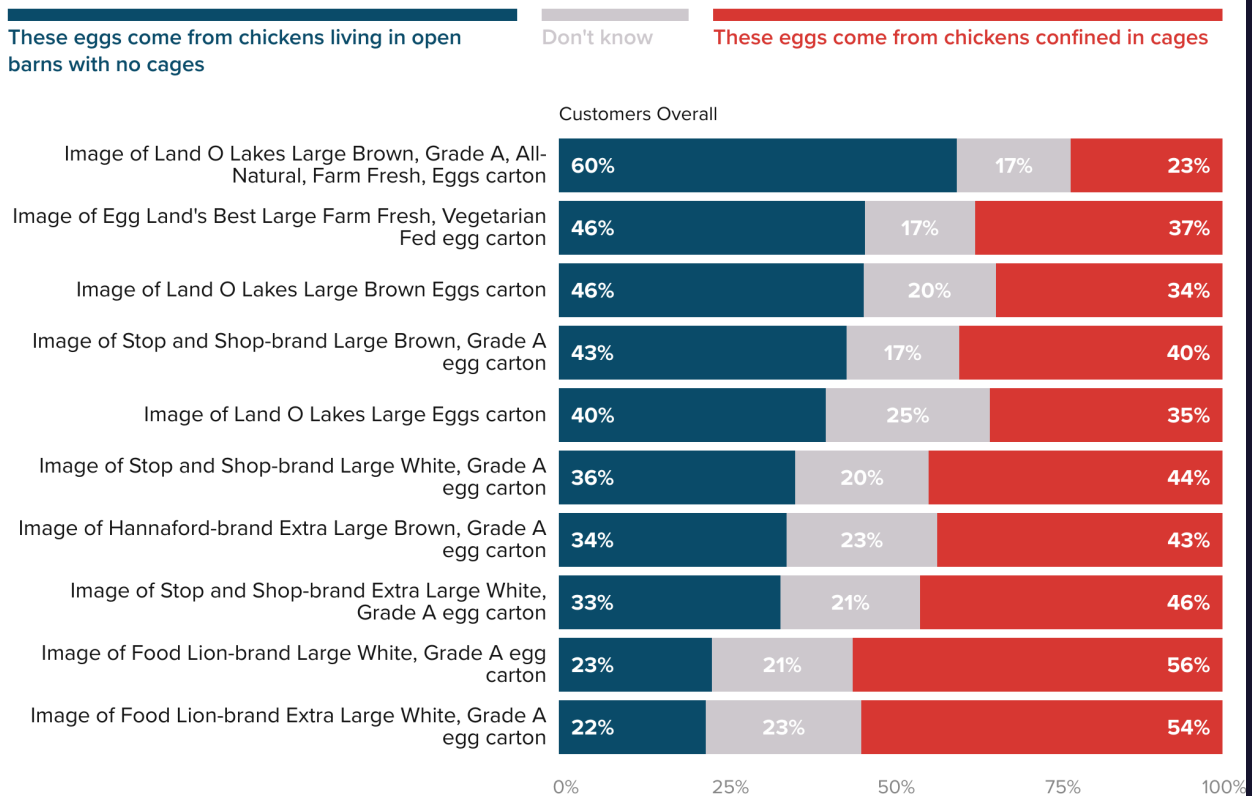
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Ahold Customers were also shown different images of egg cartons carried by the company's subsidiaries, such as Food Lion, Giant, Stop and Shop, and Hannaford (exact images can be found in the linked PDF survey [crosstabs](#)). They were then asked whether the eggs carried within each carton come from caged or cage-free chickens, based on the information provided on each carton. The data once again reveals the extent to which the cartons Ahold Delhaize sells mislead the conditions in which these eggs are produced.

## Ahold Delhaize Customers Are Misled Into Believing Egg Cartons With "All Natural" and "Farm Fresh" Labels Carry Cage-Free Eggs

*(Ahold Customers were shown images of different cartons containing eggs from caged chickens sold at Ahold Delhaize subsidiaries, such as Food Lion and Stop and Shop. Customers were then asked the question below. Exact images can be found in the linked PDF survey crosstabs).*

Based on the information provided on the carton, do you think the eggs come from chickens confined in cages or chickens living in open barns with no cages?



May 9–16, 2024 survey of 694 Ahold Delhaize customers

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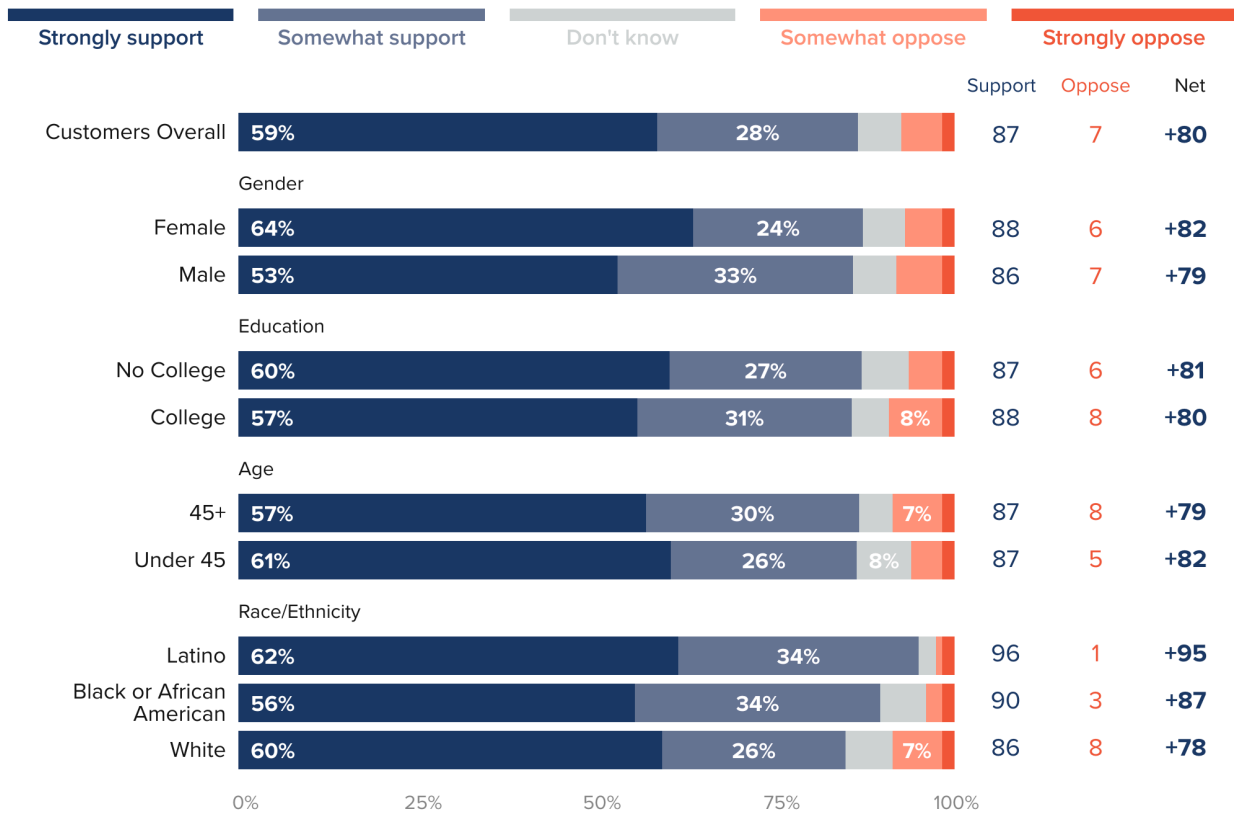


## Most Ahold Delhaize Customers Want Their Grocer to Provide More Clarity About Egg Labeling Practices

With that in mind, it is striking, but not surprising, that nearly 9 in 10 customers would support their grocery stores posting color-coded tags in the egg aisle that identify which eggs come from caged chickens. Notably, 59% of consumers **strongly** support implementing this form of identification, a sentiment shared by a majority of Ahold Delhaize shoppers across gender, age, education, and race and ethnicity.

### Customers Overwhelmingly Support Their Grocery Stores Using Color-Coded Tags in the Egg Aisle to Help Shoppers Identify Where Eggs Are Sourced From

Would you support or oppose your grocery store posting color-coded tags in the egg aisle, like the ones pictured in the image below, to identify which eggs come from caged chickens and which come from chickens not confined in cages?



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## Ahold Delhaize Groceries Stand to Benefit From Cage-Free Egg Commitments, Stand to Lose if They Renege on Their Promises

Additionally, the survey reveals that Ahold Delhaize could receive a boost in private-label egg sales if those eggs were sourced from cage-free chickens. Consumers were provided information on private-label products and asked if they would be more or less likely to purchase private-label eggs if they came from cage-free chickens. Sixty-nine percent of consumers say they either would be **much** more likely (40%) or **somewhat** more likely (29%) to purchase private-label eggs, compared with 8% who say they would be less likely to do so. Meanwhile, 22% say the source of private-label eggs would make no difference to their purchasing habits.

### Cage-Free Egg Commitments Would Make Over Two-Thirds of Ahold Delhaize Customers More Likely to Buy Private-Label Eggs

Many grocery stores sell items under their own brand names. These are called "private-label" products. For example, these products may be labeled with the store's name or its logo, like the Great Value brand sold by Walmart.

Would you be more or less likely to purchase private-label eggs if they came from chickens **not** confined in cages?



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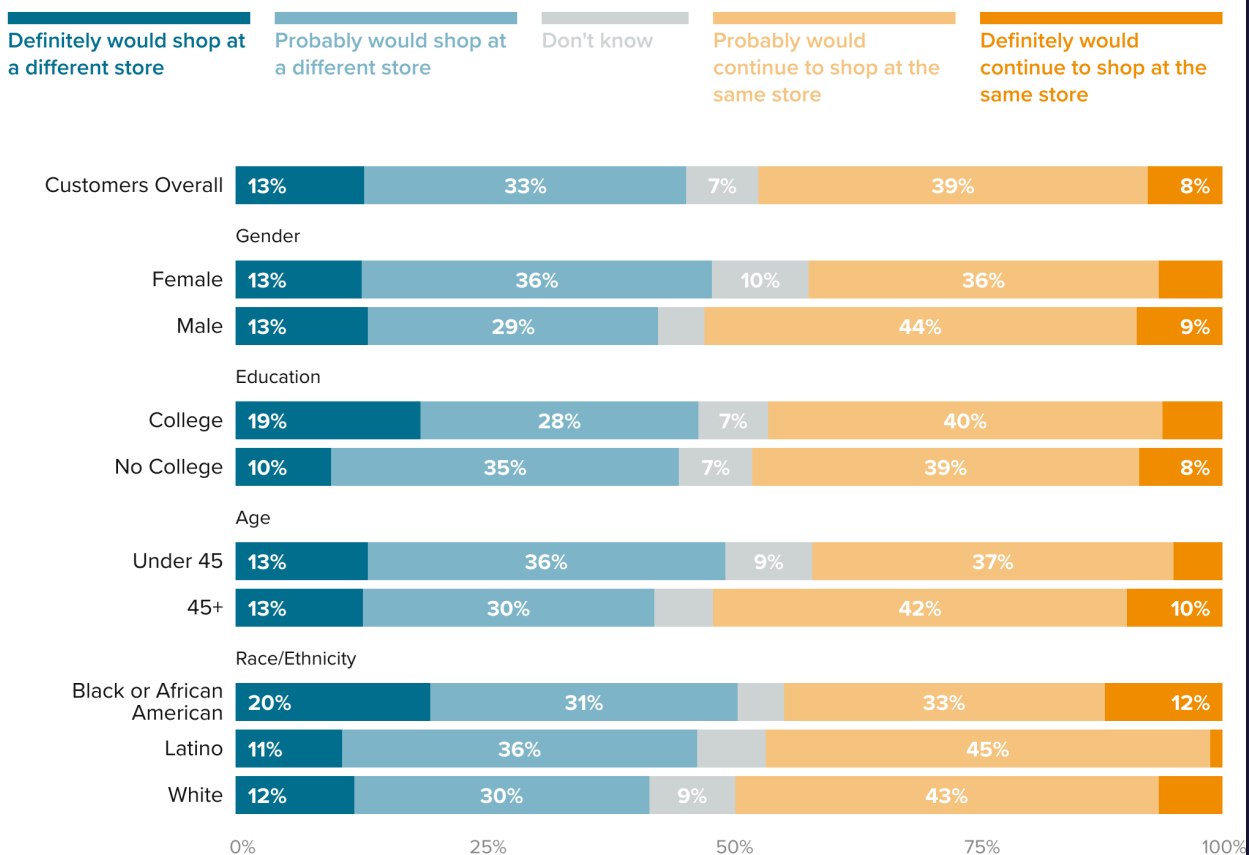
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Meanwhile, more than 4 in 10 Ahold Delhaize customers say they would shop at a different store if they heard their grocery store advertised a promise to stop selling caged eggs and then broke that promise. This includes nearly half of all women (49%), nearly half of consumers under the age of 45 (49%), and a majority of Black shoppers (51%).

## Reneging on Cage-Free Egg Commitments Would Make Over 4 in 10 Customers Shop Elsewhere

Some grocery stores have advertised that they will stop selling eggs from caged chickens.

If you heard that your grocery store **broke a promise to stop** selling eggs from caged chickens, would you continue to shop at the same store or shop at a different store?



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## Conclusion

The data paints a clear picture: **Ahold Delhaize customers do not want chickens confined in cages and are misled into buying eggs from caged chickens.**

Implementing clear, color-coded shelf tags in the egg aisle could help resolve this confusion by indicating whether eggs are sourced from caged or cage-free hens. Additionally, there is strong consumer support for converting the company's private-label products to cage-free eggs.

Given that Ahold Delhaize still maintains a commitment to exclusively selling cage-free eggs, the company stands to gain its consumers' favor by – at a very minimum – converting its private label eggs to cage-free and posting color-coded shelf tags that identify eggs from caged hens.

## Methodology

From May 9 to 16, 2024, Data for Progress conducted a survey of 694 Ahold Delhaize customers using web panel respondents. The sample was weighted to be representative of adults by age, gender, education, race, geography, and vote registration status. The survey was conducted in English. The margin of error associated with the sample size is  $\pm 3$  percentage points. Results for subgroups of the sample are subject to increased margins of error. For more information please visit [dataforprogress.org/our-methodology](https://dataforprogress.org/our-methodology)