

Packing and Grading Organic Eggs

Organic requirements are in addition to other statutory requirements
Statutory information is for guidance only and is correct at time of going to print

Please see the OF&G Control Manual for the requirements for raising organic poultry and production of eggs.

Un-graded Eggs: Farms producing a small number of eggs, normally sell them un-graded directly to the public, at the farm gate or door-to-door. The requirements in this case are that the eggs are not dirty, visibly cracked or abnormal in any way.

Grade A Eggs: If the eggs are sold through third parties, (eg shops) as Grade A eggs, the farm needs to be registered as a packing site with Defra under The Egg Marketing Standards Regulations. Registration is free and the Defra Inspector is required to visit the site at least once each year. (The Inspector is also required to visit the farm to check the welfare of the laying birds at least once each year, so will normally check the packing site on one or both of these visits.)

Eggs cannot be sold as being of a particular grade or size unless they are from a registered packing site.

Anyone keeping more than 50 hens, whether kept for meat or eggs, must inform Defra, but only those with larger flocks will tend to be inspected.

Egg Grading: The equipment needed for egg grading can be very simple – a set of single gram graduation scales to determine their size and a light source to shine through the shell to check the egg internally (this can be as simple as a torch) and there should be a device to measure the size of the air cell. The premises used for grading and packing must be suitable for the purpose and large enough to cope with the throughput of eggs. They must be kept clean, tidy and cool at all times.

The room should only be used for storage of eggs, or other products that will not contaminate eggs. Pest control and cleaning materials should be fit for purpose and stored and used safely, so as not to contaminate the eggs or affect staff.

Size Grading: Eggs are size-graded as follows:-

- small less than 53g medium 53-63g large 63-73g very large >73g +

Cleaning Eggs: Dirty eggs cannot be sold as Grade A, but washing or cleaning them is not allowed, because it can spread contamination. So the egg laying facilities should be designed to keep the eggs as clean as possible and to prevent contamination by dust, faeces, spilt feed or water.

Egg Stamping: New legislation concerning egg stamping was brought in during 2004 and now all producers selling eggs directly to the public, other than at the farm gate or door-to-door, must stamp their eggs for traceability purposes. This applies whether they are sold directly to the consumer through farmers or country markets or as Class A through retail outlets. The prefix 0 denotes the organic method of production, UK denotes that the eggs were produced in the UK and the 5 digit number 12345 is the unique number allocated by Defra to each individual production site.

Best Before Dates: All producers selling eggs, whether at the farm gate, at market or through third parties must give an indication of the Best Before Date and this must not be more than 28 days after the date of lay.

Additional Requirements for Organic Certification:

- Organic certification: Only eggs from organically certified hens may be sold as organic;
- Separation: Organic eggs must be clearly identified and segregated from non-organic eggs during intake, storage, packing, transport and display in open packaging (eggs in sealed and labelled packs do not need to be kept separate);
- Cleaning: If wet cleans are done, using detergents or disinfectants, they must be followed by a final clean water rinse to remove traces of any cleaning chemicals;
- Pest Control: Licensed rodent baits are allowed but spraying of any kind is strictly controlled;
- Records: Records must be kept so that it is possible to trace all eggs sold as organic, back to the supplier. (Even if all eggs come from the Operator's own hens, the number of eggs laid, packed and sold each day must be recorded.)
- Training: Any staff employed must be trained to understand the organic requirements;
- Labels and Marketing Literature: All labels and marketing literature must be approved by OF&G at the proof stage;
- Effluent Control: The operation should not have an adverse effect on the environment.

Further Information: There is a useful booklet about egg production and marketing available from Defra. (Either tel. 08459 335577 or download from www.defra.gov.uk/foodrin/poultry/pdfs/eggstorage.pdf).

More information is available on www.defra.gov.uk Click on "food and drink" then on "eggs and poultry".

Alternatively ring the **Defra Helpline (08 459 33 55 77)** and ask for the number of your local branch of the Egg Marketing Inspectorate.

Grateful thanks to Alan Daniels of Defra's Egg Marketing Inspectorate for checking this leaflet.

Organic Farmers & Growers Ltd: For further information about organic certification or an application pack, please contact the OF&G Processor Certification Department on:-

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W: www.organicfarmers.org.uk