

businesscompanion

trading standards law explained

Egg producers selling directly to consumers

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Although the United Kingdom has left the European Union (EU), certain pieces of legislation (formally known as 'retained EU law') will still apply until such time as they are replaced by new UK legislation; this means that you will still see references to EU regulations in our guidance.

This guidance is for England and Wales

Eggs sold directly to the consumer from a farm, by door-to-door delivery, or from a market or boot sale do not need to be weight graded or stamped but must be labelled with a best-before date, a statement that eggs should be kept refrigerated after purchase, and in certain circumstances the production site's name and address or individual code. These requirements do not apply to graded or cracked eggs. There are specific provisions for the labelling of free-range eggs and barn eggs.

If you sell your own eggs at a farmers' market or car boot sale and have more than 50 laying hens you must be [registered](#) with, and be [inspected](#) by, the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and the eggs must be marked with the method of production, as below, together with your producer identity number and the country of origin.

This guidance relates to eggs from hens. Eggs from other species of birds are not subject to marketing standards but still have to follow general labelling requirements such as the best-before date and naming the species that produced the eggs.

Registration

You will need to register with APHA if any of the following apply:

- you have 350 or more hens
- you have 50 or more hens and any of your eggs are marketed at local public markets or car boot sales
- any of your eggs are graded at a registered packing centre

When you register, APHA will issue you with a production site code; this needs to be marked on the eggs you sell.

If you have fewer than 50 hens there is no need to register with APHA unless you sell your eggs to a registered packing centre or send them to one for grading.

If you have 50 or more birds of any species you will also need to be registered with the [Great Britain Poultry Register](#) for disease control purposes. The GB Poultry Register can be contacted on 0800 634 1112.

If you are selling eggs for human consumption you will also need to be registered as a food business; please contact your local district council for further information.

Labelling requirements

A best-before date must be given ('best before' followed by a date) and this must be a maximum of 28 days after the date of lay. When applying the best-before date, consideration should be given to any thin-shelled eggs and the storage of eggs in high ambient temperatures. The best-before date does not have to be stamped on to the egg, but it must be at least supplied with it.

Appropriate storage information (such as 'keep chilled after purchase') should be provided.

For local public markets or car boot sales, eggs must be individually stamped with a code that states the production site and farming method. A notice must be displayed explaining the meaning of the letters and numbers that form the code stamped on the egg.

The farming method codes are as follows:

- 0: organic
- 1: free range
- 2: barn
- 3: caged hens

A typical egg may be stamped, for example, 3UK12345, which means:

- 3: caged hens
- UK: country of origin
- 12345: production site code

An exemption to the requirement to stamp applies for producers with a flock of fewer than 50 birds, but in these circumstances the producer's name and address must be provided on a notice.

Eggs sold in one of the three ways described above cannot be marked or advertised with a weight grade or class. For more information on this and other labelling requirements, please see '[Retail sale and labelling of eggs](#)'.

The only exception to the above labelling requirements is where the eggs on sale are produced on the premises from which they are being sold. In this case the eggs need not be weight graded or marked with any information; however, a best-before date must be given.

'Best before' and 'sell by' dates

Eggs, whether loose or packed, must be marked with a best-before date. It is best practice to sell eggs within 21 days of laying.

There is no legal requirement to have a sell-by date on eggs but it may help you to ensure eggs are sold within the 21 days. Where no sell-by date is shown, it is best practice to remove eggs from sale seven days before their best-before date.

Method of farming

The method of farming, relating to the stamped code, can be indicated using the wording below, where applicable:

- free-range eggs
- barn eggs
- eggs from caged birds

These descriptions also apply if you wish to voluntarily describe your eggs when selling from your premises or door-to-door.

If the eggs have not been produced in accordance with the methods set out for free-range eggs or barn eggs, they are automatically classed as eggs from caged hens.

Laying hens cannot be kept in cages that only meet the requirements of the 'conventional cage' system. More information about this is available in Defra's document [Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets](#) (please refer to the section headed 'Enriched cage systems: additional housing requirements').

Free range

Eggs described as 'free range' must be produced in poultry establishments in which the hens have:

- continuous daytime access to open-air runs
- access to ground mainly covered with vegetation
- at least 4 m² of ground available per bird

In addition, there are requirements in relation to the hens' housing and fittings.

Barn

Barn eggs must be produced in a poultry establishment where the hens:

- are provided with at least 15 cm perch space per hen

- have floor space providing at least 250 cm² of litter space per hen
- comply with requirements relating to the hens' housing and fittings

If you need further advice about the other descriptions of methods of farming, or the hens' housing requirements, please contact APHA on 03000 200301 in England and 0300 303 8268 in Wales.

Storage

In order to keep the eggs you sell in good condition, when storing them they must be kept:

- chilled and protected from changes to, and extremes of, temperature; between 5 °C and 17 °C is suitable
- dry, out of direct sunlight and away from other goods that might flavour them, such as onions or washing powder

You should also consider:

- handling them as little as possible, as small cracks will cause the eggs to deteriorate and lose weight
- taking care when storing trays on top of each other, as this may cause the eggs to crack

Disposal of eggs

For information on disposal of eggs not for human consumption, please see sections 9 and 25.2 of the APHA [Guidance on Legislation Covering the Marketing of Eggs](#).

Egg inspections

This is carried out by APHA. [Further information](#) relating to the above legislation, including advice on registering as a packer, can be found on the GOV.UK website.

Trading Standards

For more information on the work of Trading Standards services - and the possible consequences of not abiding by the law - please see '[Trading Standards: powers, enforcement and penalties](#)'.

In this update

No major changes.

Last reviewed / updated: December 2022

Key legislation

[Regulation \(EC\) No 853/2004](#) laying down specific hygiene rules for food of animal origin (Annex III, section X)

[Welfare of Farmed Animals \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)

[Welfare of Farmed Animals \(Wales\) Regulations 2007](#)

[Regulation \(EC\) No 589/2008](#) laying down detailed rules for implementing Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 as regards marketing standards for eggs

[Eggs and Chicks \(England\) Regulations 2009](#)

[Eggs and Chicks \(Wales\) Regulations 2010](#)

[Regulation \(EU\) No 1169/2011](#) on the provision of food information to consumers

Please note

This information is intended for guidance; only the courts can give an authoritative interpretation of the law.

The guide's 'Key legislation' links often only shows the original version of the legislation, although some amending legislation is linked to separately where it is directly related to the content of a guide. Information on changes to legislation can be found by following the above links and clicking on the 'More Resources' tab.

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