

businesscompanion

trading standards law explained

Retail sale and labelling of eggs

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ALERTS

Avian influenza housing measures to be lifted in England and Wales

11 April 2023

The Chief Veterinary Officers for England and Wales have confirmed that housing measures will end on 18 April. Birds can be kept outside and eggs can be marketed as 'free range'. [More >](#)

Free-range egg marketing derogation comes to an end

1 February 2023

Free-range egg labelling is allowed to continue in the first few months of avian influenza housing restrictions being in place. However, the 16-week grace period is coming to an end. From 1 February, eggs originating from free range flocks in Norfolk, Suffolk and parts of Essex will need to be labelled as barn eggs. This will apply to the rest of England from 27 February. [More >](#)

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

All eggs sold by retailers must be stamped with a specific code.

There are labelling requirements for eggs; those sold in boxes require a greater level of detail than those sold loose in trays.

This guidance applies only to hens' eggs being sold to consumers by retail. 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 / inspection

You must be [registered](#) with, and be [inspected](#) by, the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). You will be issued with a production site code on registration.

Markings stamped on eggs

All eggs sold at retail level must be stamped with a code stating the farming method, the country of origin (UK), and the individual code for the production site.

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

Labelling accompanying eggs at retail level

There are some differences between the labelling required for packed and loose eggs sold at retail.

Packed eggs must be labelled with, and loose eggs sold from trays must be accompanied by, the following information:

- quality grade (grade A for retail)
- weight grade
- farming method with number code (see above). These markings may be added to the production site code. The information, including the production site code, can be explained on a separate notice for clarification
- best-before date in the format 'Best before: day / month / year' (maximum 28 days from date of laying)
- the storage instruction 'Keep refrigerated after purchase'
- explanation of the code stamped on the eggs (as in the example above)

Packed eggs must also be labelled with the following:

- name of product ('eggs')
- number of eggs (unless this can be easily determined from outside the package)
- name and address of packer or seller
- packing centre code

Where eggs of different sizes are packed together, as well as the above they must be labelled with the minimum net weight of the eggs in that pack and either:

- an indication of the sizes of eggs in the pack
or
- the declaration 'eggs of different sizes'

For all types of packed eggs, the pack may also be labelled with the following information:

- selling price
- packing and/or laying date
- trader name, advertising or statements designed to improve egg sales (providing the information is not misleading)
- information as to the origin of the eggs
- information as to how the hens were fed

Eggs can only be packed into boxes by a registered packing centre. Unmarked boxes may be provided for customers' convenience for sales of loose eggs.

'Best before' and 'sell by' dates

Eggs, whether loose or packed, must be marked with a best-before date (see above). 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.

Weight grades of eggs

Only the following weight grades are permitted for eggs; no other terms may be used to describe the weights of eggs on retail sale:

- 'XL' or 'Very Large': 73 g upwards
- 'L' or 'Large': 63-73 g
- 'M' or 'Medium': 53-63 g
- 'S' or 'Small': below 53 g

Farming method

The method of farming relating to the stamped code can be indicated using the wording below, where applicable. These descriptions also apply if you wish to voluntarily describe your eggs when selling from your premises or door-to-door:

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

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

All caged hens must be kept in 'enriched cages', and it is no longer permitted to keep hens in a 'conventional cage' system'. Please refer to the [*Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullet*](#) for more information.

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 1 m² for every nine chickens
- 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

- eggs should be kept chilled to a temperature between 5 °C and 17 °C
- eggs should be kept out of direct sunlight and away from other goods that might flavour them, such as onions or washing powder
- stock must be rotated to ensure that it remains within the stated weight and quality grade
- visibly cracked eggs should not be sold

Extra / extra fresh

Packs may be labelled as 'extra' or 'extra fresh' until nine days after laying.

Eggs sold directly to consumers

For the sale of eggs by the producer directly to the consumer - for example, from the farm gate - please see '[*Egg producers selling directly to consumers*](#)'.

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 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

[Food Information Regulations 2014](#)

[Food Information \(Wales\) Regulations 2014](#)

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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