

Guidance for Retailers on Purchasing and Selling Hen Eggs in Retail Premises

The correct sourcing, handling, storage and labelling of eggs can minimise food safety issues and help to ensure egg quality and freshness.

The following information is intended to assist retailers to comply with legislative requirements and to provide guidance on best practice for sourcing, handling, storing and labelling eggs.

Hen eggs are subject to marketing standards legislation as well as the general labelling and food hygiene requirements.

Legal Requirements

Sourcing of hen eggs:

- Eggs must be sourced from an egg packing centre, wholesaler or distributor registered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine or by an equivalent body
- Each egg must be marked with the producer code

Handling and storage:

- Eggs must be sold at least seven days before the 'best-before' date expires
- Where there is a 'sell-by' or 'display-until' date on the label, eggs must be sold by this date
- Eggs that are past their 'sell-by' or 'display-until' date or within seven days of their 'best-before' date must be removed from sale
- Eggs must not be washed or wiped clean because such practices can cause damage to the egg shell
- Eggs must not be refrigerated in retail premises. However, in exceptional circumstances, the legislation allows for eggs to be transported to a retail premises under refrigerated conditions (below 5°C) provided duration of transport is not more than 24 hours. The legislation also allows short-term storage of eggs under refrigerated conditions provided that it takes place in the retail premises or an annex to the retail premises and is for not more than 72 hours
- Eggs must be stored and transported at a constant temperature until sale to the final consumer. *A maximum ambient temperature of up to 18°C is recommended because high temperatures (greater than 20°C) encourage moisture loss and quality reduction*

Why eggs are not refrigerated in retail outlets but should be refrigerated by consumers?

If eggs are refrigerated by the retailer there is the possibility that the cold eggs may become covered in condensation during transport home by the consumer. Condensation can facilitate growth of bacteria and moulds on the shell and probable entry into the egg. By keeping the eggs at a constant ambient temperature at retail level, this condensation does not occur and the eggs are then refrigerated by the consumer in the home.

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Egg Pack Labels

The following information must be on the outside of the egg pack:

- Product name, i.e. eggs¹
- Egg packing centre code
- Class A or letter 'A', alone or in combination with the word 'fresh'
- Number of eggs in the pack
- Weight grade of the eggs, i.e. small (S), medium (M), large (L), very large (XL), or 'eggs of different sizes' and the minimum net weight of the eggs in grams where eggs of different sizes are packed together in the same pack
- 'Best-before' date
- Advice to consumers to keep refrigerated after purchase
- An indication of the farming method, i.e. eggs from caged hens, barn eggs, free-range eggs or organic eggs
- Organic eggs must have the 'Euro-leaf' organic logo, the words 'Certified Organic' and code number of the certified organic body
- Explanation of producer code must be on or inside the pack
- Name or business name and address of packer or seller

Labelling of Loose Eggs

The following information must be displayed with each **batch**² of eggs sold loose, in an easily visible and clearly legible manner:

- Product name, i.e. eggs¹
- Class A or letter 'A', alone or in combination with the word 'fresh'
- Weight grade of the eggs (see above under 'egg pack labels')
- 'Best-before' date
- Explanation of the meaning of the producer code
- An indication of farming method (see above under 'egg pack labels')

Best Practice and Guidance

- Broken, cracked or damaged eggs, and soiled egg packaging should be removed from sale and disposed of.
- Non-compliant eggs should be returned to the supplier or disposed of in a food bin.
- Breakages or spillages should be cleaned up immediately.
- Before and after handling eggs or egg packaging, staff should wash their hands.
- Eggs should be stored away from sources of strong odours as egg shells are porous and can absorb taints.
- The egg storage and display areas should be kept clean and tidy.
- Eggs should not be stored next to direct heat sources and there should be good air circulation around the egg packaging.
- It is recommended that the information in this factsheet is incorporated into staff training programmes.
- Sourcing eggs produced under the Bord Bia Sustainable Egg Quality Assurance Scheme (SEQAS), or an equivalent scheme is recommended. These eggs have the quality assurance logo and 'best-before' date stamped on each egg.

Farmers Markets

For sale of hen eggs in farmers markets, please refer to the Food Safety Authority of Ireland publication [Labelling and Hygiene Guidelines for Producers of Small Quantities of Hen Eggs](#)

Useful links to legislation and food safety information

www.fsai.ie | www.agriculture.gov.ie

¹ The word 'Eggs' on the egg pack or on a sign when eggs are sold loose fulfils the allergen labelling requirements.

² **Batch** means eggs in packs or loose from the same producer or packing centre, with same 'best-before' date, same quality, weight grading and farming method.