



EGGS - FOR SALE?

Throughout the year, Egg Marketing Inspectors in DAERA's Agri-food Inspection Branch receive many queries about producing and selling eggs. These often relate to where and how the eggs may be sold and whether the eggs can be called "Free Range". This leaflet addresses some of the most frequently asked questions.

I keep twenty hens and sell my eggs to friends and passers by - am I allowed to do this?

Yes. Egg Marketing regulations in the Eggs and Chicks Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 allow producers to sell ungraded eggs, within 28 days of lay, at the farm gate, door-to-door or at a local public market. Ungraded eggs may not be sold in "honesty boxes" or in vending machines unless these are situated on the farm where the eggs are produced.

Do I need to register my flock?

Under The Avian Influenza (Preventive Measures) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007, everyone who keeps birds of any species must register with DAERA's Veterinary Service. Only pet birds kept in cages indoors are exempt. Additionally, under the Registration of Establishments (Laying Hens) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, premises with **350 or more** laying hens must be registered with DAERA's Egg Marketing Inspectorate, regardless of how or where the eggs are sold. A unique producer distinguishing number will then be issued.

Also, a producer with more than 50 hens who sells their eggs at a local market must register with the Egg Marketing Inspectorate to obtain a producer number for stamping on eggs. Egg Marketing Inspectorate contact details are provided overleaf.

My hens are kept in a large barn to protect them from foxes although I do let them out at weekends - can I call the eggs Free Range?

No, under Egg Marketing regulations, the hens must be let out **every** day. Eggs described as Free Range have to meet certain criteria. The hens must have

continuous daytime access to a range area of at least one hectare (2.5 acres) for 2,500 hens or 0.4 hectares (1 acre) for every 1000 hens and which provides protection from predators.

Houses may be stocked at no more than nine hens per square metre of floor space, and litter, nestboxes and perches must be provided.

I have eighty Free Range hens and banties. In summer I have so many eggs that I would like to sell them through my local butcher - what do I need to do?

Only Class A eggs may be sold through a retail outlet or to a restaurant and they must be graded by quality and weight in an authorised packing centre which has also been approved under EU Food Hygiene regulations. Even if there are fewer than 350 hens, the production site must also be registered with DAERA and the distinguishing number allocated has to be stamped on all Class A eggs.

If the eggs are to be described as Free Range, the production unit must also be approved by DAERA.

What must I do to get Authorisation and Approval as a packing centre?

A Packing Centre Authorisation application form and explanatory leaflets can be downloaded from the Egg Marketing page on DAERA's website: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/egg-marketing> or alternatively you may request them from Agri-food Inspection Branch - see contact details below. **The Food Standards Agency (FSA) must also Approve your premises.**

See FSA webpage at:

<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/applying-for-approval-of-a-meat-or-food-establishment-by-the-fsa>

You must provide details of the premises and equipment intended for grading and packing eggs and, in addition to various record keeping requirements under Food Hygiene legislation, premises must be easily cleaned, vermin-proof, insulated to protect the eggs from extremes of temperature and suitable handwashing facilities must be provided. Equipment is necessary to sort eggs into weight bands and a light source provided to “candle” eggs for freshness, internal quality and shell integrity.

You will be issued with a provisional packing centre number which must appear on all packs or labels with the following specified information:

- Name and address of packing centre or business.
- Class (A) and Size of eggs (XL, L, M, S).
- Method of production
- Number of eggs in pack.
- Explanation of Code on Eggs
- Consumer advice to keep chilled after purchase.
- Best before date (maximum 28 days after lay).

Class A eggs **must** be individually stamped with the producer number - this will provide traceability and indicate the method of production.

A key explaining the producer number must also be provided on the pack, or on a sign if eggs are sold loose on trays.

Agri-food Branch Inspectors will visit your premises and production unit to ensure compliance with the Regulations and, if approved by FSA, you will be notified in writing. **Only then may you sell your eggs to shops, bakeries, restaurants, guesthouses etc.**

The Inspector will make unannounced visits at regular intervals during the year to check the quality of the eggs and the hygiene of the premises and equipment, and to ensure that all the correct information is provided on the

packs and the eggs. Egg Marketing regulations require you to keep detailed records on the production and sales of eggs.

Records required include:

- Date, number and age of hens when placed on farm.
- Number of eggs produced and graded each day.
- Number, grade and “best before” dates of eggs sold each day along with the name and address of any business purchaser.

The Inspector will collect these records at regular intervals and check that the production criteria, e.g. for Free Range, are fully complied with; also that hygiene and vermin control is satisfactory.

I keep some ducks and geese and would like to sell the eggs to my local shop. Do the same rules apply?

The Egg Marketing regulations enforced by DAERA refer specifically to hen eggs. Sales of small quantities of duck and goose eggs, directly to the consumer or to a local shop, are covered by general food safety legislation which is enforced by District Councils. Other forms of sales are subject to Food Hygiene legislation which requires eggs to be kept clean, dry and insulated and delivered to the consumer within 28 days from lay.

Is there any other legislation concerning egg production which I should be aware of?

Under The Control of Salmonella in Poultry Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2008, most egg producers (but particularly those with more than 350 hens) must have samples from flocks tested for *Salmonella* and if a flock of laying hens is found to be infected with certain types of *Salmonella*, the eggs cannot be sold as Class A or for direct human consumption but must be heat treated or disposed of at an approved establishment.

Further information on these requirements is available from DAERA’s Divisional Veterinary Offices – the contact details can be provided by Agri-food Inspection Branch at the address below.

For further information or advice please contact:

DAERA Agri-food Inspection Branch, Poultry & Eggs, Clare House, 303 Airport Road West, Belfast, BT3 9ED. Tel: 028 90520905 E-mail: AFIB.EggsTeam@daera-ni.gov.uk