



Regulations for Specific Products

Selling Eggs

Eggs are a popular item to direct market and selling eggs is a relatively easy enterprise to begin. Technically, an “egg” refers to the shell egg of chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, guinea fowl and any other species of poultry. If you have a flock that is under 3,000 hens, then they are exempt from USDA grade requirements and fall under state law RCW 69.25. This fact sheet covers:

- On-farm sales and Community Supported Agriculture regulations;
- Egg Handler/Dealer License;
- Facility requirements for eggs;
- Egg handling: cleaning and refrigeration;
- Packaging eggs and labeling cartons;
- Distribution; and
- Retail sales and health department jurisdiction.

On-Farm Sales and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Pick-up Regulations

People who sell eggs from their own flocks directly to consumers at the place of production (i.e. their home, farm, or CSA on-farm pick-up location) do not need an “Egg Handler/Dealer License.” Therefore, these “on-farm” sales do not require Egg Seals, labels or new cartons. However, clean containers must be used and eggs must be stored at 45 F or less. CSA farms with pick-up sites off-farm are required to have an Egg Handler/Dealer License.

Egg Handler/Dealer License

An Egg Handler/Dealer License is required for any person or business intending to:

- produce, handle, contract for, or obtain possession or control of eggs for sale or barter to wholesalers, dealers or retailers within or into Washington; OR
- process eggs and sell them to wholesalers, dealers, retailers or consumers within or into Washington; OR
- warehouse and distribute eggs.

Licensed egg handler/dealers are required to meet standards for egg handling facilities, cleaning, refrigeration, packaging and labeling, distribution and sales. An Egg Handler/Dealer License must be posted at each location where the licensee operates.

Egg Handler/Dealer License is a specialty license obtained through the State of Washington Business Licensing Service. In 2013, it cost \$30 for the first location and \$15 for each additional location. You will need a Master Business License in order to get the Egg Handler/Dealer License. For more

information, please call (800) 451-7985, email BLS@dor.wa.gov or visit <http://bls.dor.wa.gov/eggdealer.aspx>.

The WSDA Food Safety Program visits Egg Handler/Dealer License holders to inspect facilities and egg handling practices. During these visits the inspector may offer technical assistance regarding the egg regulations, egg packaging and labeling and egg temperature requirements. The Food Safety Program works with egg producers, food storage warehouses, transportation activities, and with the wholesale and retail sale of eggs.

Please do not hesitate to contact the WSDA Food Safety Program if you have questions or concerns about egg handling and labeling, email foodsafety@agr.wa.gov or call (360) 902-1876.

Facilities Requirements for Eggs

A licensed egg handling facility must include a work area, designated storage, potable water, a hand-washing station, and a refrigerator.

The work area for egg handling requires a sanitary work surface that is smooth, durable, and easily cleanable. This work surface must be cleaned and sanitized before each use. Any sinks, drain boards, or other equipment used for the egg handling operation must be cleaned and sanitized before each use.

A designated work area must be separate from domestic living areas. Acceptable work areas may be an area in the basement, garage or outbuilding. Unacceptable work areas are domestic living areas, kitchens, laundry rooms and bathrooms.

Designated storage areas are required for new packaging materials, utensils and equipment that may be used for the egg handling practices. These items must be protected from contamination (e.g., moisture, strong odors, dust or insects).

If water is used for cleaning eggs, it must be potable. Individual water wells require an annual bacteriological test (i.e., coliform bacteria). Commercial bottled water may be used.

Hand washing stations must be conveniently located in the egg handling work area and near your toilet facilities. Hand washing at the work area may be provided by a hot and cold plumbed hand sink or a portable hand wash “system” (such as a five-gallon insulated container with a continuous flow spigot, filled with warm water between 100 F and 120 F, a five-gallon pail to catch wash and rinse water; a pump-type liquid soap dispenser and paper towels). Hand wash water must be potable.

A designated refrigerator for the eggs is required. The refrigerator does not need to be new or commercial and may be placed outside the egg handling area such as in the garage. The refrigerator needs a thermometer that enables you to verify that egg storage is maintained at 40 F to 45 F.

Egg Handling: Cleaning and Refrigeration

The following steps and procedures are the guidelines from the WSDA Shell Egg Producer Guidelines for Off-Farm Sales.

Hands must be thoroughly washed before starting egg handling and during egg handling to minimize cross-contamination of “finished” eggs.

Maintain clean and dry nest boxes, change nest material as needed to reduce dirty eggs. Gather eggs at least once daily.

Soon after collecting, clean eggs as needed. (Cleaning eggs refrigerated below 55 F may cause shells to crack or check.) Using only minimal cleaning protects the natural protective covering on the shell.

Acceptable egg cleaning methods include:

- dry cleaning by lightly “sanding” the stains or minimal dirty areas with sand paper;
- using potable water in a hand spray bottle and immediately wiping dry with a single service paper towel; and/or
- briefly rinsing with running water spray and immediately wiping dry with a single service paper towel.

The “wash” water should be a minimum of 90 F, which is warm “to the touch,” and shall be at least 20 F warmer than the temperature of the eggs to be washed.

Unacceptable cleaning methods include submerging shell eggs in water or any other solution or using cleaners that are not food grade and approved for shell egg cleaning.

Note that the porous eggshell is not impervious to odors, chemicals and “off” flavors.

Since eggs are a perishable food, “cleaned” eggs must be held under sanitary conditions with refrigeration temperatures at 45 F or less. The “cleaned” eggs can be packaged later.

Packaging Eggs and Labeling Cartons

Shell egg producers are required to sell eggs in any type of new packaging or container, provided that the eggs are protected from damage and/or adulteration. By adulteration we mean contact with leaking or damaged eggs or any other poisonous or deleterious substance that may render the contents injurious to health. Please note that it is unlawful to reuse old egg containers to package eggs. It is also unlawful to package eggs in containers labeled with another firm’s name and/or identification number.

There are very specific requirements for what needs to be on an egg container. Each new carton must include:

- Common name of the food: “Eggs”
- If other than a chicken egg, then the type of egg: “Duck”
- Quantity, the number of eggs: “One Dozen”
- Name and address of the egg producer
- The statement: “Keep Refrigerated”

- ❑ The statement: “SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS: To prevent illness from bacteria: Keep eggs refrigerated, cook eggs until yolks are firm, and cook foods containing eggs thoroughly.”
- ❑ If the eggs are not graded and not weighed, do not label with a grade or size. Indicate “Ungraded,” “Not graded” (see following information)
- ❑ A “Pull Date” or “Best By” date (see following information); and
- ❑ An Egg Seal (also see following).

To meet the above egg carton requirements, you can use labels designed on a home computer and printed on stock, self-adhesive labels.

Shell eggs are subject to grading and sizing. Quality designations and sizing weight ranges are determined by candling and weighing (WAC 16-104 and the USDA Egg Grading Manual). If the eggs are ungraded and not weighed, the packages/cartons shall not be labeled with a grade or size.

Cartons must include a “Pull Date” or “Best By” date. It may be hand written on the end of the carton or in a conspicuous location that is clearly discernible. The “Pull Date” must first show the month then the day of the month (e.g., Jun 14 or 06 14). Recommended dates are 30 days after production and should not exceed 45 days after production.

In addition, every egg carton is required to have an “Egg Seal” for each dozen eggs if they are sold as “intrastate commerce” which includes farmers markets and retail outlets. (As previously mentioned, eggs sold directly off the farm are not required to have an Egg Seal on the carton.) One thousand Egg Seal stickers can be purchased directly from the WSDA Food Safety Program by completing the form found online at www.agr.wa.gov/foodanimal/eggs/docs/EggSealsOrderForm2505.pdf and mailing it with a check for \$2.68 to the Washington State Department of Agriculture at the address on the form.

Eggs that are sold in bulk are required to have the same information listed above for egg containers, with two exceptions. The container for eggs sold in bulk would have a “Bulk Egg Seal” instead of the regular dozen egg seal and the container is not required to include the quantity. Bulk Egg Seals for 5 or 15 dozen are available from WSDA on the Egg Seal Order Form.

Distribution

Egg packages and cartons should be transported in an easily cleanable, portable cooler with frozen gel packs to maintain a temperature of 45 F or less until eggs are distributed to retail outlets or sold to consumers.

Retail Sales and Local Health Department Jurisdiction

Local health departments have jurisdiction over farmers markets and retail stores that sell eggs. They may require additional permits and conduct inspections to ensure farm compliance with local rules and regulations such as labeling and storage.

Recommended Fact Sheets

- 4. Licensing
- 35. Selling and Processing Poultry

For further information, to provide comments, or suggest a resource to add to this fact sheet, please email smallfarms@agr.wa.gov or call (360) 902-2888.