

Safe Egg Handling for Backyard Egg Producers from the Mass. Dept. of Agricultural Resources web site.

Good poultry management practices are the key to producing quality eggs. The first step is to start with healthy chickens. All poultry and hatching eggs in the commonwealth must be sold with certification proving they originated from a flock that tested negative for salmonella pullorum. Providing adequate shelter for your birds that offers protection from weather and predators is the next step in producing quality eggs. The shelter should be large enough to comfortably fit all the birds at once. Offer clean dry nesting boxes, providing a minimum of one box for every four birds. Supplying fresh food and water is essential in maintaining a healthy flock.

A happy, healthy hen will always produce more eggs. Should your egg production exceed your personal needs, selling fresh eggs to the public is an option. Before selling any eggs, make sure to check with your local Board of Health.

Freshness is a factor of both time and temperature. Eggs should be collected at least twice a day, in the morning and afternoon. Removing eggs from nesting boxes promptly helps keep eggs intact and clean. Clean eggs do not need to be washed. Broken and cracked eggs should be removed from those being offered for sale. Cracked and stained eggs may be sold from the property where produced, when packed separately and labeled as such.

If you need to wash eggs, do not allow the eggs to sit in water. Water must move across the surface of the shell at all times. The water must be at least 10°F warmer than the eggs; otherwise bacteria may be pulled through the shell into the egg. When using an egg wash or sanitizer follow all instructions. If the wash water come from a private well the water must be tested every six months for specific bacteria. These test results must be kept on file for inspection.

Collected eggs must be held between 33°F and 45°F to decrease bacteria growth. It is not advised to store eggs near items with strong odors. These odors can be absorbed and give the egg an “off” flavor.

Eggs should be offered for sale in clean unused cartons that are correctly labeled. The FDA requires a safe handling statement to appear on the carton. The statement must read “**SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS:** To prevent illness from bacteria: keep eggs refrigerated, cook eggs until yolks are firm, and cook foods containing eggs thoroughly”. Only purchase cartons with the preprinted safe handling statement. The “packed on” or “sell by date” must also be printed on the end of the carton. The “sell by date” would be 30 days after the packing date. The description of the eggs packed in the carton must be printed on the carton in letters 3/16th of an inch or larger. The producers name, address, and phone number should also be included.

When it comes to marketing your eggs you have several options. You may choose to size and grade your eggs or not. Grading is done by candling and sizing is done by weight. In any case you must describe what is in the carton. Many small producers choose to identify their eggs as “Not Graded and Not Sized”. “Not Graded and Not Sized” (also referred to as “Nest Run”), means you have not candled or weighed the eggs and are packing them without any sorting in any way. All eggs, regardless of Grade or Size or those sold as Not Graded and Not Sized, should be clean and have no visible signs of breakage.

Grades and sizes are standard throughout the U.S. and descriptions of each are found on the MDAR website. For more information please contact the Division of Animal Health at 617-626-1796 or www.mass.gov/agr/animalhealth/poultry