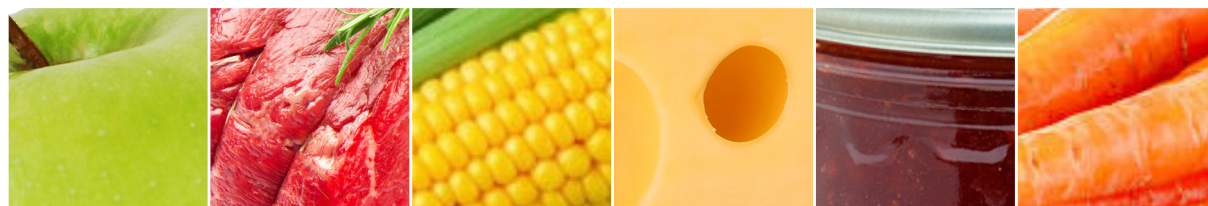


ENHANCING THE SAFETY OF LOCALLY PREPARED FOODS



Publication FST-347NP



What do I need to know to sell SHELL EGGS at the farmers market?

Why sell eggs?

Shell eggs are a popular item sold at farmers markets. Selling eggs in the direct market can be very profitable.

Who regulates eggs?

Nationally, shell eggs are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. But in Virginia, shell eggs are regulated under the Virginia Egg Law, which is enforced by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Division of Commodity Services.



Figure 1. Example of eggs. (Photo courtesy of Pixabay).

What is the Virginia Egg Law?

The Virginia Egg Law covers egg standards, egg grades, requirements for eggs labeled as “fresh,” sanitation practices, advertising practices, seller invoice requirements, and other aspects related to selling eggs in Virginia (VDACS 2017b).

Do eggs to be sold at the farmers market have to be inspected?

You are exempt from VDACS inspection if you (1) sell fewer than 150 dozen eggs (1,800 eggs) per week from your own hens or (2) sell fewer than 60 dozen eggs (720 eggs) per week that were purchased from another producer to sell. All other producers are required to be inspected by VDACS’ (2017a) Food Safety Program.

All eggs sold in Virginia (regardless of exemption) must meet the following requirements (VDACS 2017a):

- ▶ Eggs must be clean, unbroken, and free of adhering dirt and manure.
- ▶ Eggs must be refrigerated at 45 °F (7.2 °C) or lower.
- ▶ The carton (used or new) to store the eggs should be clean and sanitary.
 - If used cartons have a USDA grademark, it must be marked out. If you do not cross out the original grademark, you are illegally misrepresenting your product.
- ▶ Cartons must be properly labeled with the following:
 - Name and address of the packer or producer.
 - Net contents (number of eggs per carton) of the package (e.g., half-dozen, one dozen).
 - Statement of identity: “Eggs.”
 - Consumer Grade: AA, A, B, or Ungraded.
 - Cartons must be labeled with storage instructions: “Refrigerate Eggs.”
 - Must include, verbatim, the following safe handling instructions statement: “Safe Handling Instructions: To prevent illness from bacteria, keep eggs refrigerated, cook eggs until yolks are firm, and cook food containing eggs thoroughly.”
 - If eggs are labeled as “fresh,” eggs must comply with the requirements (stated below).

“This work is supported by Food Safety Outreach Program [grant no. 2016 0020-25888/project accession no. 1010671] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture”



Eggs sold under the exemption must still be produced under good sanitation standards and be labeled properly.

What is the criteria for labeling eggs as “fresh”?

In Virginia, eggs may be deemed “fresh” only if they are (1) Grade A quality or better (i.e., A or AA) and (2) clean on the outside. The egg’s grade can be determined by hand-candling to check the inside of the egg; the U.S. Commodity Standards and Grades must be followed (USDA 2000; fig. 2).

SPECIFICATIONS FOR EACH QUALITY FACTOR			
Quality Factor	AA Quality	A Quality	B Quality
Shell	Clean Unbroken. Practically Normal.	Clean Unbroken. Practically Normal.	Clean to slightly stained.* Unbroken. Abnormal.
Air Cell	1/8 inch or less in depth. Unlimited movement and free or bubbly.	3/16 inch or less in depth. Unlimited movement and free or bubbly.	Over 3/16 inch in depth. Unlimited movement and free or bubbly.
White	Clear. Firm.	Clear. Reasonably firm.	Weak and watery. Small blood and meat spots present.**
Yolk	Outline slightly defined. Practically free from defects.	Outline fairly well defined. Practically free from defects.	Outline plainly visible. Enlarged and flattened. Clearly visible germ development but no blood. Other serious defects.
For eggs with dirty or broken shells, the standards of quality provide two additional qualities.			
	Dirty	Check	
	Unbroken. Adhering dirt or foreign material, prominent stains, moderate stained areas in excess of B quality.	Broken or cracked shell, but membranes intact, not leaking.***	
	* Moderately stained areas permitted (1/32 of surface if localized, or 1/16 if scattered). ** If they are small (aggregating not more than 1/8 inch in diameter). *** Leaker has broken or cracked shell membranes, and contents leaking or free to leak.		

Figure 2. Summary of U.S. standards for quality of individual shell eggs. (Note: This figure can be found as table 2 in the USDA’s [2000] Egg-Grading Manual.)

Can I also sell my eggs to retail establishments?

If you follow the requirements listed above, your eggs are considered to be from an “approved source” and can be sold at restaurants and retail sources in addition to the farmers market.

How do I clean my eggs in preparation for sale at the market?

Eggs can be either lightly sanded or washed to remove excess dirt. Do not wash eggs that have previously been sanded.

Eggs should be washed in potable water that is 20°F (6.67°C) warmer than the eggs’ temperature; the water should be at least

90°F (32.2°C). Only approved sanitizers may be used for egg washing. A common sanitizing solution can be made by mixing 0.5 ounce of household bleach (5% sodium hypochlorite) in 1 gallon of potable water.

Wash eggs by following these three steps:

1. Place eggs in suspended colander.
2. Rinse (without submerging) eggs with the wash solution. Never let eggs sit in water because they can absorb contaminants from the water.
3. Cool and dry eggs immediately afterward.

At what temperature should my eggs be stored?

Eggs must be kept at refrigerated temperatures of 45°F (7°C) or lower at all times.

- ▶ At home, eggs should be stored with refrigeration.
- ▶ At the farmers market, if you don’t have access to refrigeration, coolers with refreezable ice/cool packs can be used (VDACS 2015). Eggs cannot be kept on ice because they must remain dry to reduce the chance of contamination.

What is the shelf life of an egg?

The shelf life of an egg is about 30-45 days from the day the egg is laid. Safe handling and storage conditions (e.g., lower refrigeration temperatures) will extend the shelf life of an egg up to 45 days.

What should I do with my cracked/leaker eggs?

Cracked and/or leaking eggs should not be sold!

What are egg grades?

Egg grades are quality standards set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA-AMS). The grading of an egg is not indicative of the safety of the egg. For more information about U.S. Commodity Standards and Grades, refer to figure 2 or the USDA’s (2000) Egg-Grading Manual.

How does egg grading work?

In Virginia, you are not required to grade your eggs; it is a voluntary process. However, if you would like to sell your eggs specifically with terms such as “fresh” or “U.S. Grade A,” or use the USDA grademark (see fig. 3), your eggs must be graded by a licensed USDA-AMS grader and grading must be conducted through VDACS. If you do not plan to use the USDA grademark, you may grade your own eggs. If you do not want to grade your eggs, the carton label must state that the eggs have not been graded (“Ungraded”).



Figure 3. Example of official USDA Grade A and Grade AA grademarks



(USDA 2000).

There are two ways to grade your eggs:

1. VDACS Office of Commodity Services offers a voluntary, fee-based poultry and shell egg grading program.
2. You can grade your own eggs without a USDA grader by “candling.” (Please see “Safe Egg Handling for Small Egg Laying Flocks in Virginia” (VDACS 2015) for how to grade your eggs by candling.)

References

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