

Farm Fresh Eggs: Food Safety & Quality

Providing your customers with eggs that are raised, collected, cleaned, packed, stored and distributed with food safety in mind is good for business! Whether you sell or give away the eggs you raise, it is important to rest assured you have done all you can to make sure your eggs maintain their high quality and are safe from bacteria and other contaminants that could cause food borne illness!

In Idaho, small egg producers (individuals with less than 300 birds) can sell the eggs direct to consumers and retailers. Handling and labeling must be in accordance with the Idaho Food Code and the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's labeling requirements. It is your responsibility to know and understand the rules and regulations that apply to you. Contact your local health department and/or the Idaho State Department of Agriculture for information on how Idaho's rules and regulations apply to you!

Production Area

- Make sure your chicken house is dry and floor litter is in good condition.
- Clean nests regularly and replace/replenish nesting materials as needed.
- Mount perches away from the nest area.
- Have a plan to control Salmonella carriers such as rodents, flies, beetles, wild birds and cats.
- Store feed in containers that will prevent contamination.
- Clean feeding and watering equipment in an area other than where the eggs are washed.
- Clean and sanitize chicken house is cleaned at least once per year (wood can be sanitized!).

Collecting Eggs

- Collect eggs a minimum of once daily and 2-3 times a day if possible.
- Only collect eggs from known, regularly monitored and regularly maintained nesting boxes.
- Discard eggs with broken or cracked shells.
- Soon after collecting, clean eggs as needed (cleaning eggs refrigerated below 55° F may cause shells to crack or check).

Cleaning Eggs

- Wash hands with soap and potable water before and after cleaning eggs.
- Clean and sanitize egg cleaning area.
- Minimal cleaning protects the natural protective covering on the shell.
- Dry cleaning:
 - Clean shells with fine sandpaper, a brush or emery cloth.
 - Do not use rags or sponges to clean or scrub eggs
- Wet cleaning:
 - Use potable water. If using well water, perform an annual bacteriological test.
 - Water temperature for both washing and rinsing should be thermostatically controlled.
 - Maintain wash water at 90° F or above
 - Wash water must be at least 20° F warmer than the temperature of the eggs.
 - Clean using hand spray bottle filled with potable warm water and immediately wipe dry with a single service paper towel, or

- Briefly rinse with running water and immediately wipe dry with a single service paper towel.
- Do not submerge eggs in water or any other solution. If shell gets wet, bacteria can pass through the shell.
- Do not use cleaners that are not food grade and approved for shell egg cleaning.
- Eggshells are porous and pervious to odors, chemicals and “off” flavors.
- Hold cleaned eggs in sanitary conditions with refrigeration at 45° F or less.

Candling Eggs

- Look for defects inside the shell by holding the egg up to a bright light.
- Discard eggs with abnormal shape, spots, cracks or other irregularities.

Egg Packaging

- Under Idaho rules and regulations, fiber egg cartons can be reused if they are clean. *This is not a recommended best practice for food safety. You cannot guarantee used egg cartons are free from microbial and chemical contaminants.*
- If you are reusing cartons, remove prior packing information from the label. Blacken out the dates, the packers name and contact information with a permanent marker.
- *Talk to your buyers as they may require the use of new egg cartons.*

Labeling

- In Idaho, egg carton labels must include:
 - Individual’s name, physical address, zip code and phone number.
 - Safe handling instructions: “To prevent illness from bacteria: keep eggs refrigerated, cook eggs until yolks are firm, and cook foods containing eggs thoroughly.”
 - “Ungraded eggs”
- Consider including a package date in Julian calendar (day of year) format. See <https://www.fs.fed.us/fire/partners/fepp/julian-calendar.pdf>

Egg Storage

- Refrigerate eggs at 45 degrees or less. Refrigerator should have a thermometer that enables you to verify egg storage is maintained at 40-45° F.

Food Safety Sources:

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/food/food-safety/preserving/eggs-dairy/buying-farm-fresh-eggs/>
<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/licensing/inspections/~media/Files/food/foodsafety/eggssales.ashx>
<https://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Eggs/>

Idaho Resources:

Idaho Food Code

<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Portals/0/Health/FoodProtection/Full%20Idaho%20Food%20Code.pdf>

Idaho Statutes

<https://legislature.idaho.gov/statutesrules/idstat/Title37/T37CH15/SECT37-1523A/>

Idaho State Department of Agriculture

<http://www.agri.idaho.gov/AGRI/Categories/Animals/Eggs/indexeggsmain.php>