

Do I need to be registered with the Egg Marketing Inspectorate?

Do egg producers need to be registered with the Egg Marketing Inspectorate?

If you enter the world of egg production you will also enter the world of the Egg Marketing Inspectorate. The Egg Marketing Inspectorate, (EMI) is the body within England and Wales that interprets and defines EU law as regard to eggs.

You will need to register with them if you:

- Have more than 350 layer birds
- Have more than 50 layer birds and are selling at local public markets
- Any of your eggs are sold to a registered packing centre

You do not need to be registered with the EMI if you have less than 350 layer birds and are selling your eggs direct to individual consumers at the farm gate or by door-to-door sales. If you have less than 50 birds but sell some or all of your eggs at a local public market you do not need to be registered with the EMI. However you will have to comply with Food Labelling Regulations. This means that the label contains the name of the product, (Eggs!), your name and address, best before date and advice to the buyer to keep the eggs chilled.

Great Britain Poultry Register

However, if you have more than 50 birds, of any species (other than wild birds) you will need to register with the Great Britain Poultry Register, (GBPR). This body was set up after the potential avian flu risk to monitor poultry numbers and to allow prompt alerts to be given to individuals if needs be. The GBPR can be contacted by phone 08006341112.

Egg Packing Centre

If you do need to register with the EMI then you will either be selling all your eggs to a registered Egg Packing Centre or you will have to establish your own egg-packing centre. A packing centre must be approved separately as a food business operator by the local authority (Environmental Health department) and be authorised by the EMI to grade and pack eggs. Once authorised the packing centre can receive eggs from other registered producers. As a Food Business Operator approved by the local authority a packing centre will be expected to meet hygiene standards, keep certain records and put together a HACCP report. The packing centre, once authorised by the EMI will be given an individual packing centre code, which then must be applied to all labels of graded eggs. The EMI will then expect that the packing

centre has the appropriate equipment to:

- Candling equipment
- Equipment to measure air space in eggs
- Weight grading equipment
- Equipment for stamping eggs

Also required by the EMI and for the labelling of eggs, is the production method, e.g. Free Range, Barn Reared, Caged, Enriched Cage or Organic production. Each of these production methods have a define criteria regarding stocking rate, perch space, pop hole size, range area ect.

Class A Eggs

The EMI define the standards and quality that an egg should reach to be called class A. A class A egg shall not be washed or cleaned before or after grading. It is also not permissible to chill the eggs before it is purchased. This is to avoid temperature variation before it is purchased. It should have the following characteristics:

- Normal shape, clean and undamaged
- Air space height not exceeding 6mm
- Yolk: visible on candling as a shadow only, without clearly discernible outline, slightly mobile upon turning the egg and returning to a central position
- White: clear translucent
- Germ: imperceptible development
- Foreign matter: not permissible
- Foreign smell: not permissible

Class A eggs must be sold according to weight The weight grading are:

- XL Very Large 73g or more
- L Large 63 up to 72g
- M Medium 53g up to 62g
- S Small below 53g

Immediately after grading class A eggs must be packed and labelled with the following information:

- The quality class A
- The weight grading
- The best before date (a max of 28 days after laying)
- Method of production
- Advice to consumers to chill after purchase
- Explanation of code stamped on eggs
- Packing centre code

- Name of product i.e. "eggs"
- Name and address of packer or seller

- The number of eggs (unless it is easy to determine the number of eggs within the pack).

Records

When you contact the EMI they will provide you with a list of all the records that need to be kept as a producer and as a packing centre. Most of them you will already be keeping for your own use, or for a certifying body, or will be kept through your invoices (number of eggs sold and to whom). Therefore although the list looks daunting it is not as bad as it may at first seem. It is important to note that the EMI may request such information and it is expected that this is provided upon first request. Inspections by the EMI are normally unannounced. The frequency and duration of an inspection depends on the value and volume of eggs marketed and also upon the compliance history of an individual. Although they are an enforcement agency they will normally first advise compliance; only if compliance is not achieved will more formal steps be taken.

Contacts

Although EMI inspectors are scattered throughout England and Wales there are two administrative centres. Covering the South and Wales:

Egg Marketing Inspectorate

Fourth Floor

Quantock House

Paul Street

Taunton

Somerset, TA1 3NX Tel: 01823 337922

North England

Egg Marketing Inspectorate

Government Buildings

Otley Road

Lawnswood

Leeds

West Yorkshire, LS16 5PZ Tel: 0113 2300100

Thinking of setting up an egg packing unit in Wales?

You may be eligible for a Welsh Assembly Processing and Marketing Grant which offers up to 40% funding towards projects that add value to agricultural and forestry products in Wales. Juliet Fay of The Welsh Poultry Centre is a Welsh Assembly accredited Food Business Development Officer. Please contact her for more information.

About the author

Steve Merritt of The Welsh Poultry Centre is accredited with the Institute of Organic Training and Advice (IOTA) and is an adviser for the Government funded Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS). On this scheme farmers who are interested in converting to organic production are entitled to free advisory visits. Contact Steve for more details. He also offers private consultancy on free-range poultry production (meat birds and eggs) and poultry processing.