

Eggs are a popular item to direct market and are a relatively easy enterprise to begin. Flocks under 3,000 hens are USDA grade exempt and fall under state law. Washington egg sales are specified in the “Washington wholesome eggs and egg products act,” RCW 69.25. An “egg” refers to the shell egg of chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, guinea fowl and any other species of poultry.

This fact sheet covers:

- on farm sales and CSA 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.
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On Farm Sales and CSA Regulations

Poultry producers who sell eggs from their own flocks at the place of production directly to household consumers do not need to be licensed. On farm sales are not subject to the same requirements as licensed operations. Therefore, Egg Seals are not required, nor are labels on new cartons. However, clean containers must be used and eggs must be stored at 45 ° F or less.

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.

Licensed producers are required to meet standards for egg handling facilities, cleaning, refrigeration, packaging and labeling, distribution, and sales.

The WSDA Food Safety Program visits Egg Handler/Dealer License holders to inspect facilities and egg handling practices. During these visits the inspector offers 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. Go to the WSDA Food Safety “Egg Licensing Information” page online at <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/Eggs>, or email foodsafety@agr.wa.gov or call (360) 902-1876 for the WSDA Shell Egg Producer Guidelines for Off-Farm Sales. It is available in the Egg Information Packet.

The Egg Handler/Dealer license costs \$30.00 per year and is available through the Washington State Department of Licensing (WSDOL). You will need a Master Business License in order to get the Egg Handler/Dealer License. Go to www.dol.wa.gov/business/eggdealer.html or call (360) 664-1400 for more information.

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).

Potable water is required for egg handling practices. 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 pump-type liquid soap dispenser, paper towels, and a five-gallon pail to catch wash/rinse water can be used.

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 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.

Refrigeration

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 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:

- a. common name of the food – “Eggs”;
- b. if other than a chicken egg, then the type of egg “Duck”;
- c. quantity, the number of eggs, “One Dozen”;
- d. name and address of the egg producer;
- e. the statement “Keep Refrigerated”;
- f. 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.”
- g. If the eggs are not graded and not weighed, do not label with a grade or size. Indicate “Ungraded”, “Not graded” (see below);
- h. Pull date or “best by” date (see below); and an
- i. Egg Seal (also see below).

To meet the above 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, not to exceed 45 days.



In addition, cartons are required to have an “**Egg Seal**” for each dozen if they are sold as “intrastate commerce” which includes farmers markets and retail outlets. Eggs sold directly off the farm are not required to have an Egg Seal on the carton. Egg Seals can be purchased directly from the WSDA Food Safety Program. They cost \$2.68 for 1,000 stickers. Go to the WSDA Food Safety “Egg Licensing Requirements” page online or call (360) 902-1886.

Eggs that are **sold in bulk** are required to provide the same information as above, except that they do not have to include the quantity. Typically a placard displays the information for the consumer at the point of sale. Bulk Egg Seals are available from WSDA and the egg producer would place the Egg Seal on the bulk container.

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 outlet 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 and may conduct inspections to assure vendor compliance with local rules and regulations such as labeling and storage.

Recommended Fact Sheets: Licensing, Poultry Processing and Marketing Regulations

For further assistance or to make suggestions on how to improve this fact sheet, please email smallfarms@agr.wa.gov or call (360) 902-2057 or (360) 676-2059.