TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION

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Selling Yard Eggs in Texas

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Backyard egg producers may sell their eggs under certain conditions set by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS).

Producers selling eggs from their own flocks to the end customer must obtain a permit from DSHS or their local health department. You also need a license to sell eggs to restaurants or retailers or to resell other producers' eggs.

If you sell at a farmers market, you must meet all the requirements set by state and other local jurisdictions. The eggs must always be stored at 45°F or lower. Producers must label their egg cartons *Ungraded* followed by *Produced by [producer's name],* along with the producer's address in legible, printed, boldface type.

The egg cartons must include a Safe Handling Instructions statement inside the lid or on the principal display panel (the part of a label that is most likely to be displayed or examined under customary conditions of display for retail sale) or information panel (any panel next to the principal display panel):

> **SAFE HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS:**
> **To prevent illness from bacteria: keep eggs refrigerated, cook eggs until yolks are firm, and cook foods containing eggs thoroughly.**

If this statement appears inside the lid, the words *Keep Refrigerated* must appear on the principal display panel or information panel (Fig. 1).

Only graded eggs of a Grade A or better can be described as *fresh, yard, selected, hennery, new-laid, infertile,* or *cage,* or with words that have similar meanings. Only certified organic producers can label their eggs as being "organic."

Licensed producers must submit monthly or quarterly reports to the Texas Department of Agriculture and keep the reports at the

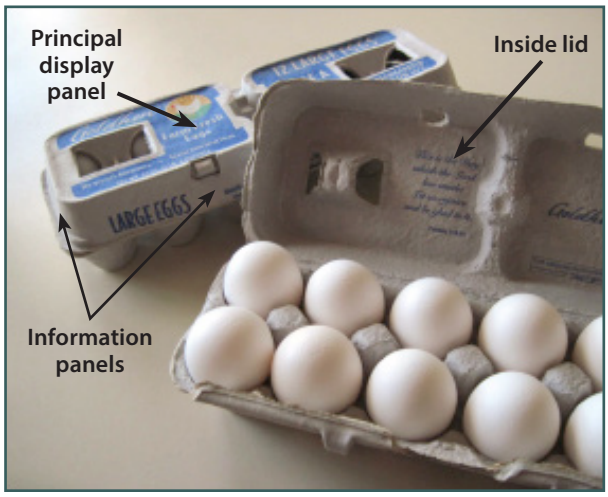

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Figure 1. Parts of an egg carton

licensed location for 2 years. The reports are subject to yearly inspection, and fines may be assessed for noncompliance.

Reports are due by the 10th of the month after the end of each reporting period. Producers must report monthly if they buy or sell both graded and ungraded eggs, or if they are the first to assign a grade to the eggs.

A grading fee of 6 cents per 30-dozen case must accompany the monthly report.

In-state licensees may report quarterly if they buy and sell only eggs that have been graded already. Quarters run September–November, December–February, March–May, and June–August.

Handling and storage practices

Even if you handle the eggs carefully and follow good farm-management practices, a small percentage of eggs will be dirty. Dirty eggs are covered with bacteria that can cause spoilage or illness if they enter the egg.

Wash the eggs properly to minimize the chances of bacteria penetrating the shell. Careless washing can cause more damage than just leaving the dirt on the shell. Take steps to ensure that the eggs sold are safe to consume and of the highest quality:

- If possible, collect eggs at least twice a day, at noon and in the evening.
- Keep the nests clean. Clean nests usually result in cleaner eggs.
- Wash the eggs as soon as possible.
- Use wash water that is at least 20°F warmer than the internal temperature of the egg and at a minimum of 90°F. Using a wash solution that is colder than the egg causes the egg content to contract and draw in polluted water through the shell.
- Choose a detergent that does not impart foreign odors to the egg.
- After washing the eggs, rinse them with a warm water spray containing an approved chemical sanitizer. The water should be slightly warmer than the wash water.
- The washing process removes most of the outer cuticle from the eggshell, which increases the loss of carbon dioxide and moisture from inside the egg. To reduce this loss, many producers spray their eggs with a light coating of food-grade mineral oil. For best results, check the entire oiling system, including spray nozzles, filters, and oil storage reservoir, often to make sure that the equipment is working properly and that the oil is free from contamination.
- Dry, sort, grade, and cool the eggs quickly after washing.
- Refrigerate the eggs, small end down, at 45°F or below. Refrigeration helps preserve the internal quality and reduces the potential for bacterial growth.
- Always use new cartons for storing and selling eggs. It is not permissible to sell eggs in another producer's carton.
- To avoid cross-contamination, thoroughly clean and dry plastic flats after each use.

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- Thoroughly clean all equipment and processing rooms at the end of each processing day; make sure that they remain reasonably clean throughout the processing shift.
- Keep the processing equipment far enough away from walls and other equipment that it can be cleaned, maintained, and inspected.
- Provide sufficient overhead lights to facilitate cleaning the room.

Note: These are just basic guidelines. Before selling eggs, review and follow the recommendations outlined in the current version of *Regulations Governing the Voluntary Grading of Shell Eggs,* which is available at https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/Regulations%20for%20Voluntary%20Grading%20of%20Shell%20Eggs.pdf.

Cooking practices

Consumers should store their eggs in the refrigerator until used. Never eat raw eggs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends that all eggs and egg dishes be cooked until the yolks are firm or to a minimum internal temperature of 160°F. Use a food thermometer to measure the temperature.

When preparing recipes that call for raw or undercooked eggs, use pasteurized eggs or egg products.

For more information

Grading eggs: Texas A&M Poultry Science Center, 979-845-4319. USDA Egg-Grading Manual, https://www.ams.usda.gov/grades-standards/shell-egg-grades-and-standards

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Handling and consuming yard eggs: County office, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, http://counties.agrilife.org/

Handling yard eggs: *Small-Scale Egg Handling,* http://sd.appstate.edu/sites/sd.appstate.edu/files/egghandling.pdf

Obtaining an egg license: Texas Department of Agriculture Egg Quality Program, 512-463-7698, http://texasagriculture.gov/regulatoryprograms/eggqualityprogram.aspx

Obtaining retail permits: DSHS–Retail Food Establishments Group, 512-834-6753, https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/foodestablishments/

Organic certification: Organic certification department, Texas Department of Agriculture, 512-936-4178, https://www.texasagriculture.gov/RegulatoryPrograms/Organics/OrganicContacts.aspx

Acknowledgments

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