AgBrief
Egg Grading and Egg Safety
Food Quality Assurance Unit, April 2013

MDA's Food Quality Assurance Program conducts a variety of inspections, audits, registrations and certifications of agricultural commodities and facilities to provide consumers with safe, high quality food products while maintaining fair trade practices and enhancing product marketability for the agricultural industry. This AgBrief focuses on the program's work with egg safety and egg quality.

The Maryland Egg Law

The Maryland Egg Law requires all eggs sold in the state to meet standards for safety, quality, labeling and weight. Everyone selling eggs, even small backyard producers, must comply with it. The law is designed to ensure that Maryland consumers have wholesome, high quality eggs. MDA is responsible for enforcing this law.

Quality standards require that eggs labeled as Grade AA or A must be fresh with no bloodspots and the shells must be clean and uncracked. Maryland law prohibits the sale of ungraded, cracked, dirty and/or old eggs.

For a synopsis of the Maryland Egg Law, see: http://mda.maryland.gov/foodfeedquality/Documents/synopegglaw.pdf

To read the complete standards for shell eggs, see: http://mda.maryland.gov/foodfeedquality/Documents/usda_egg_qual_std.pdf

Enforcement of the Maryland Egg Law

MDA inspects small egg producers, large egg producers, wholesale, food service and retail outlets to ensure eggs sold in the state originate from a registered packer and meet the standards established for quality, size, refrigeration, microbial and physical contamination, labeling and record keeping. MDA removes eggs from sale that do not comply with established standards and issues violation notices to offenders. Repeated or severe violations of the

MDA egg inspectors check eggs for quality standards.

Maryland Egg Law can result in civil penalties, registration revocation and/or criminal prosecution.

During FY 2012, MDA found that 86.48% of all eggs inspected were in compliance, up from 83.9% the year before.

All wholesalers and egg packers selling eggs in Maryland must register with MDA annually, and all packers must document that the flocks producing their eggs are at low risk of Salmonella enteritidis (SE) by originating from a hatchery participating in the National Poultry Improvement Plan, participating in

an approved Egg Quality Assurance Plan or testing by MDA. All registered and approved packers are listed on the MDA website.

This inspection and registration system also allows MDA to trace where an egg came from in the event of an egg-related food borne illness.

For more information about the program, see: http://mda.maryland.gov/foodfeedquality/Pages/egg_inspection.aspx

Maryland Egg Quality Assurance Program

The Maryland Egg Quality Assurance Program is a voluntary program for producers and processors who agree to implement specific management and monitoring practices that have successfully prevented Salmonella enteritidis (SE) contamination of table eggs. Basic prevention practices include specific ways to conduct rodent control, clean and disinfect between flocks, monitor pullet and layer houses and to ensure proper on-farm handling of eggs. Premise testing is conducted throughout the process to verify practices are effective. **Participation in this program is required to use the Maryland's Best seal on the cartons.** MDA provides oversight, technical advice and compliance inspections for the program.

For more information about the program, see: http://mda.maryland.gov/foodfeedquality/Pages/egg_quality_assurance.aspx

MDA Grading Services

Grading Services evaluate commodities to determine whether they live up to official standards. MDA grades eggs, poultry, meat, fruit, vegetables and grain for producers and processors.

MDA's Egg Grading Service grades and certifies the quality, size, weight, as well as the production and processing practices of eggs at egg packing plants in Maryland.

MDA egg graders are trained and licensed by both MDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to certify eggs according to both state and/or federal standards. Eggs that are packed in Maryland bearing the USDA shield are washed, graded and packed under the continuous supervision of a MDA grader. MDA's USDA licensed graders monitor for compliance with quality and weight standards, sanitation of the packing facility, wash water temperatures and cooler temperatures. **Consumers who purchase poultry and eggs identified with the USDA grade shield can be assured of the quality of the product they are purchasing.**

During FY 2012, MDA certified the grade of 27.9 million dozens of shell eggs and 229.3 million pounds of poultry.

For more information about MDA Grading Services, see: http://mda.maryland.gov/foodfeedquality/Pages/grading.aspx

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