

Grading and packing eggs

At Freeranger Eggs we collect our eggs two or three times a day to eliminate most of the problems of breakages and dirty eggs. This also ensures that the eggs are in the coolroom shortly after they are laid.

We use traditional nest boxes with wood shavings although we have one set of roll-away boxes as an experiment. However, the chooks don't like it. In the shed where it's installed there are generally only three eggs laid in the flash roll-away system and all the others are in the nest boxes with wood shavings. So much for modern technology!

It is not necessary for our eggs to be washed – if there are any light markings they can easily be removed with an abrasive pad. Many farms wash their eggs because they are dirty, but this is a reflection on their management practices. If the nest boxes are clean and there is no mud or build-up of manure around the sheds, the eggs laid should all be clean. Washing eggs removes a natural bloom on the surface of the egg and can increase the entry of bacteria into the eggs unless correct washing temperatures and sanitising solutions are maintained.

Once the eggs reach the grading room, they are candled (passed over a light to show any cracks in the shell or imperfections such as air bubbles or blood spots) and then graded for size. All eggs with imperfections are rejected for sale and used on farm.

To guarantee top quality our eggs are usually in the cool room within an hour or so of being laid. Our production, grading, packing and storage process are detailed in our HACCP- based Food Safety and Quality Assurance Program.

We have five different weight grades for our dozen packs: **Megga Eggs** are 950 grams; 840 grams; 750 grams; 700 grams and 600 grams. We also have 500 gram **10 packs** and 1.5 kilo **24 egg packs**.

Our labels are printed on farm and comply with all labelling regulations – production method, contact details, best before date etc. (We use a Best Before date of four weeks from the date lay, many farms use six weeks from the date of packing – which is often at least a week after the eggs were laid).

Temperatures are controlled on farm and because we only deliver locally, the eggs are well within accepted temperatures as they are delivered to shops and restaurants. Eggs taken to Farmers' Markets are packed in temperature controlled poly boxes to maintain quality control. At so many markets, egg sellers have just plain boxes of eggs without any form of temperature control even on hot summer days. Some producers travel for many hours and if they attend multiple markets over a weekend the eggs may be out of temperature control for 48 hours or more.

