



Egg producer testing program

Food safety is of paramount importance to Canadians. Whether concerned about E. coli in beef, listeria in cheese or salmonella in poultry meat, consumers insist on and deserve food that is nutritious, affordable and, most of all, safe.

All foods must be grown and handled properly to ensure their safety. Canada's egg producers are dedicated to growing the safest and highest quality eggs possible. That is why they have developed testing programs to protect eggs and consumers from Salmonella enteritidis (SE).

Salmonella can cause serious gastrointestinal illness in human beings and can even be fatal for people with weakened immune systems, such as those taking chemotherapy, the elderly or the very young. Most salmonellas that can make people sick are not found inside eggs. SE is an exception as it can be passed from the laying hen to the inside of the egg. This is, however, extremely rare.

Thorough cooking destroys salmonella but Canadians enjoy eating their eggs a variety of ways—hard or softly cooked. Canada's egg producers want to ensure people can continue to eat eggs safely. That is why they test for SE in their barns.

Sampling

Every year, environmental samples are taken from barns. These samples may include dust from floors, ventilation fans or walls. They may also include bird feathers. In the laboratory, the samples are enriched to encourage any SE, if present, to multiply so they can be more easily detected.

The presence of SE in the environment indicates a remote possibility of SE in some of the eggs from that barn. Consequently, when a positive finding is confirmed, eggs are sent to breaking plants where they are broken and then pasteurized to destroy Salmonella which may be present. The liquid, dried or frozen egg product made in these plants is used in a variety of foods.

Testing is just one of the many steps taken by egg producers to ensure the quality and safety of eggs. Other quality assurance procedures are outlined in the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency's Start Clean-Stay Clean™ program. This program is based on principles recognized by the World Health Organization's food standards committee. In addition, Start Clean-Stay Clean™ completed a technical review by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in 2004.



With this program, farmers producing eggs under quota issued by the Canadian Egg Marketing Agency and the provincial-territorial marketing boards are inspected annually and informed of ways to ensure product quality and freshness. The purpose of the inspection is to continually improve on the way eggs are produced.

Handling tips

You can help ensure safety and quality in eggs by practicing these handling tips:

- Store eggs in the refrigerator in their original carton. Don't store them in the door area, even if it has an egg tray.
- Wash hands with hot, soapy water before and after food preparation.
- Serve eggs and egg-rich foods immediately after cooking or refrigerate and serve within three to four days.
- When refrigerating large amounts of hot egg-rich food or leftovers, divide it into several shallow containers to ensure rapid cooking.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. To ensure freshness and quality, food should be prepared in small batches.
- Pasteurized egg must be handled properly, too. Store liquid egg products under refrigeration both before and after opening containers, or according to the directions on the package. Frozen egg product should be kept frozen until needed.
- Remove only the amount of processed egg needed at one time.