



## EGG NUTRITION CENTER

### Guide to Egg Carton Labels

The egg carton was invented in 1911 by newspaper editor Joseph Coyle of Smithers, British Columbia, to solve a dispute between a local farmer and hotel owner over the farmer's eggs often being delivered broken. Before its invention, eggs were carried in egg baskets. The egg carton "box" was further developed by H.G. Bennett (Riseley UK) during the 1950s and became the norm for egg transportation during this period.

The Egg Nutrition Center is overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which reviews the ENC's educational materials.

Egg Nutrition Center



eggnutritioncenter.org

# Egg Carton Labeling Terms

## ABBREVIATIONS:

DV=Daily Value

USDA = United States Department of Agriculture

FDA = Food and Drug Administration

mg= milligrams

**Antibiotic-Free** – This term can be misleading as all eggs produced in the U.S., even if not specified on the egg carton, are antibiotic-free. However, if hens become ill and antibiotics are needed, they're used on a therapeutic level under the supervision of a veterinarian. If hens are given an antibiotic at this level, their egg production is likely to severely decrease. Any eggs produced would be diverted from human consumption according to FDA regulations.

**Brown Eggs** – Brown eggs are laid by red-brown feathered breeds like the Rhode Island Red, New Hampshire, and Plymouth Rock. Slightly larger than white-feathered hens, these breeds often require more feed. According to USDA, the nutritional content is the same as white eggs unless the feed is nutrient-enhanced. Nutrient content has nothing to do with shell color.

**Cage-free/Free-roaming Eggs** – Eggs laid by hens at indoor floor operations, sometimes called free-roaming. The hens may roam in a building, room or open area, usually in a barn or poultry house, and have unlimited access to fresh food and water, while some may also forage for food if they are allowed outdoors. Cage-free systems vary and include barn-raised and free-range hens, both of which have shelter that helps protect against predators. Both types are produced under common handling and care practices, which provide floor space, nest space and perches. Depending on the farm, these housing systems may or may not have an automated egg collection system.

**USDA Shield** – The official USDA grade shield on an egg carton certifies that the eggs have been processed, packaged and certified under federal supervision according to the U.S. Standards, Grades and Weight Classes for Shell Eggs established by USDA. Plant processing equipment, facilities, sanitation and operating procedures are continuously monitored by the USDA egg grader. Egg farmers pay for this service.

**Enriched Colony** – A production system that contains adequate environmental enrichments to provide perch space, dust bathing or a scratch area (s), and nest space to allow the layers to exhibit inherent behavior. Enriched colony systems are American Humane Certified.

**Fertile Eggs** – Eggs which, if not refrigerated, can be incubated and hatch into chicks. These eggs result when hens and roosters are housed together. While these eggs may contain a small amount of male hormone, they do not possess any known nutritional differences from non-fertile eggs. Almost all eggs sold in the marketplace are non-fertile.

**Free-Range Eggs** – Eggs produced by hens that have access to outdoors in accordance with weather, environmental or state laws. The birds have continuous access to fresh food and water and may forage for wild plants and insects. They are also provided floor space, nesting space and perches.

**Good Source of Protein** – All eggs qualify for this nutrient content claim because they meet or exceed 10% of the DV.

**Gluten Free** – All eggs are naturally gluten free. If the chicken is fed a grain that contains gluten i.e. corn, wheat or barley, the gluten is broken down during the digestive process (within the chicken) and is not passed into the body tissues or any products produced by the chicken.

**Hormones** – The egg industry does not use hormones in the production of shell eggs. A "no hormone" statement may appear on a label for shell eggs, but FDA requires that it be accompanied with the qualifying statement "Hormones are not used in the production of shell eggs" to prevent misleading consumers that some eggs have added hormones.

**Expiration/Best By Date** – On USDA grade-shielded egg cartons: if an expiration date appears, it can be no more than 30 days after the pack date; if a best-by or use-by date appears, it can be no more than 45 days after the pack date. Eggs not packed under USDA's grading program must be labeled and coded in accordance with state laws. Kept in their carton, shell eggs can be stored in the refrigerator at 45° or less, without loss of quality, for three to five weeks after purchase.

**Natural** – USDA identifies all shell eggs as natural.

**Nutrient- Enhanced Eggs** – Eggs which are produced by hens fed a special diet that may include things like flax seed, marine algae or fish oils.

- Good Source of Vitamin D- All eggs qualify for this nutrient content claim. An egg must contain a level of 10% or more of the DV for vitamin D which is currently 400 IU on the Nutrition Facts Panel.
- Good Source of Protein- All eggs qualify for this nutrient content claim since a serving (1 large egg) provides more than 10% of the DV for protein.
- Contains \_\_\_mcg. Lutein- There is no DV established for lutein, so only the amount present may be declared with disclosures. All eggs naturally provide a small amount of lutein, but eggs from hens fed a lutein-fortified feed may contain higher levels of lutein. Research shows that lutein from eggs may be more bioavailable, or absorbed and utilized by the body, than from richer sources.
- Omega 3 – This declaration must state the amount of omega-3 fatty acids. Shell eggs contain some naturally occurring omega-3 fatty acids, on average about 30 mg per egg. Omega-3- enhanced eggs provide more, from 100 to over 600 mg per egg.
- Vitamin E – Eggs labeled with this nutrient content claim must contain more than 10% of the DV or 3 IU of vitamin E. Most eggs would not meet this definition; the hens must be fed a fortified diet in order to produce eggs with this level of vitamin E.

**Organic Eggs** – Eggs that are laid by cage-free, free-roaming hens that are raised on certified organic feed and have access

**Grade AA Egg** – Grade quality and weight (size) are not related to one another. Eggs of any quality grade may differ in weight (size). In descending order of quality, grades are designated AA, A and B according to both their interior and exterior quality.

to the outdoors. The hens' feed is grown without most synthetic pesticides, fungicides, herbicides or fertilizers, and 100% of the agricultural ingredients must be certified organic. Antibiotics and growth hormones are prohibited (although these will not be found in any shell eggs). Producers with more than \$5,000 in annual sales of organic eggs must be certified by a USDA accredited certifier. The egg carton must bear the name of the certifier.

**Pasteurized Eggs** – Eggs heated to temperatures just below the coagulation point to destroy pathogens. These eggs are recommended for recipes that call for raw eggs or for people susceptible to illness who prefer runny eggs. Pasteurized shell eggs must be kept refrigerated.

**Pastured Eggs** – Pastured eggs originate from hens free to roam and forage on a maintained pasture area. The vegetarian diet may be supplemented with grain. The hens are moved to various pasture areas to maintain vegetation. USDA does not recognize a labeling definition for pastured eggs as no standards are established. If an egg packer elects to use the terminology to describe shell eggs, the term should include an explanation located on the label.

**Vegetarian Eggs** – Produced by hens fed a vegetarian diet.

**Zero Trans Fats** – Indicates that an egg contains 0.5 grams or less trans fatty acid per egg, which is true of all eggs.

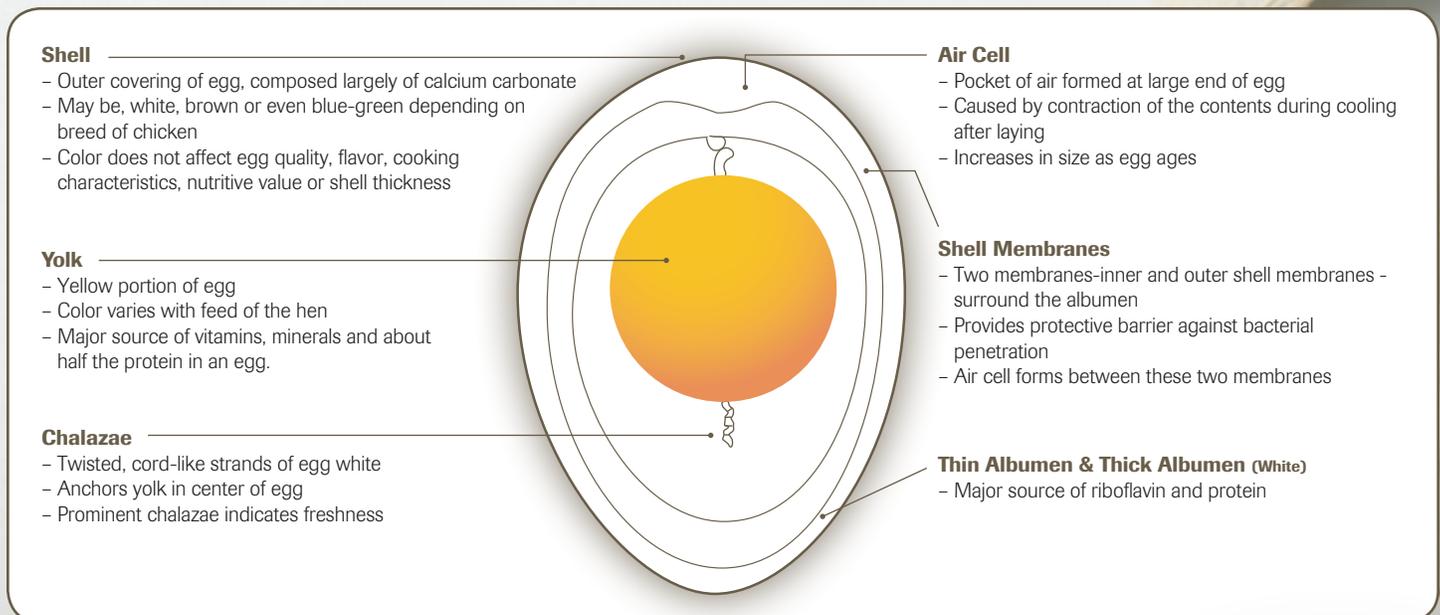
**Zero Carbohydrates** – Indicates that an egg contains 0.5 gram or less of carbohydrate per egg, which is true of all eggs.

## How the Grades Differ:

GRADE AA	GRADE A	GRADE B
 <p>Egg content covers a small area. White is firm, has much thick white surrounding the yolk and a small amount of thin white. The yolk is round and upstanding.</p>	 <p>Egg content covers a moderate area. White is reasonably firm and has a considerable amount of thick white and a medium amount of thin white. The yolk is round and upstanding.</p>	 <p>Egg content covers a very wide area. The yolk is enlarged and flattened.</p>

**Egg grades are labeled AA, A and B. There is no difference in nutritive value between the different grades. All eggs sold at the retail level must meet the standards for Grade B or better. Although Grade B eggs are just as wholesome to eat, they rate lower in appearance when broken out. Few Grade B eggs find their way to the retail supermarket. Most go to institutional egg users such as bakeries or food service operations.**

## What's in an Egg:



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