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NEW TESTS SHOW UK BEATS SALMONELLA IN EGGS
UK egg producers call for same standards on imported eggs

The British Egg Industry Council (BEIC) has welcomed a new report by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) which has confirmed the success of the UK egg industry in overcoming salmonella in eggs.

UK egg producers are now calling on the Government to ensure that all eggs sold in the UK are produced to the same high safety standards as those stamped with the British Lion mark.

More than 28,000 UK-produced eggs were tested by the FSA and no salmonella was found inside any of them. Only nine eggs had salmonella on the shell; these would not normally pose a health risk if the eggs were handled correctly.

This contrasts with the most recent Health Protection Agency tests on imported Spanish eggs, of which nearly seven per cent tested positive for salmonella. Spanish eggs have also been linked this year with a food poisoning outbreak at a cafe in central London, with one-third of the Spanish eggs used by the café testing positive for salmonella.

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More than 80% of UK eggs are currently produced under the industry's voluntary Lion Code of Practice, a comprehensive programme incorporating the highest standards of food safety. British Lion egg producers now believe that two of the Lion Code's key elements – salmonella vaccination and a 'best before' date stamped on every egg – should be imposed on all eggs sold in the UK.

"We are delighted that this important report has acknowledged the huge success of the UK egg industry's salmonella eradication programme," says Andrew Parker.

"The investment made by BEIC producers has been entirely voluntary, and salmonella vaccination alone has cost our industry £20 million over the past five years.

"It is now time for the Government to insist that all eggs sold in the UK are produced to these very high safety standards."

A previous report in 2001 by the Government's Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food showed that human cases of salmonella in England and Wales more than halved in the three years following the introduction of the British Lion programme.

"The British Lion is the one good news story for UK agriculture. Not only have we effectively eradicated salmonella, but we have also increased consumer confidence which means that egg sales are now rising," says Andrew Parker.

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For further information please contact Amanda Cryer or Kevin Coles, British Egg Information Service on 020 7370 7411; mobiles 07770 432405 or 07776 026012

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Note to editors:

More than 80% of UK eggs (90% of retail egg sales) are produced to the British Egg Industry Council (BEIC) Lion Quality Code of Practice. The scheme covers 760 laying farms and 47 packing centres.

The Lion Quality Code of Practice sets stringent food safety standards including vaccination of laying hens against salmonella; testing of hens and eggs; full traceability; time and temperature controls; and extensive biosecurity measures, including control of rodents and effective cleansing and disinfection between flocks.

In 2003 the BEIC significantly increased the level of independent monitoring of the Lion Quality scheme. As part of the accreditation of the Lion scheme to the EN 45011 quality standard, BEIC has moved to independent auditing of 100% of all Lion Quality feed production, hatching, pullet rearing, egg production and egg packing units.

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