



Agricultural Marketing Service

# Cage-Free Verification Of USDA Graded Shell Eggs



The Quality Assessment Division (QAD) provides USDA Grading and Certification services for shell eggs on a voluntary, fee-for-service basis. These services are provided nationwide by highly trained, impartial USDA graders. Our services assist in the marketing of agricultural products worldwide.

### Grading Service

The grademark, or USDA shield, indicates that USDA has officially graded the product and that the product met all the requirements of the designated quality standard. In addition to quality grading, USDA graders inspect facilities for proper sanitation and refrigeration, and verify proper identification/traceability (code dating, plant numbers, etc.)

Officially graded product can be marketed using the USDA shield on the product labeling.



### Contact Us

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Quality Assessment Division

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### Certification Services

QAD can certify that shell eggs meet company-specific purchase requirements for a variety of needs, from tightened quality standards and labeling preferences to sourcing from cage-free flocks. This service ensures that shell egg purchasers – such as retail grocers, schools, restaurants, and the military - receive product that complies with their unique specifications and contractual requirements.

### Truth in Labeling

All cartons bearing a USDA shield, whether packed to a purchase specification or not, must go through a pre-market approval process. **QAD assesses whether claims are appropriate and verifiable.**

### Cage-Free Flock Verification

QAD verifies that farms have cage-free flock capacity as evidenced by observation.

- Once per year to verify
- Record general size of flock

- Identify flock by address, code, flock ID, etc. (used at time of packing)

Processing plants may pack eggs from several off site farms that produce cage-free eggs. QAD visits each farm/barn to verify production methods.

### Segregation Plan and Monitoring

When cage-free eggs arrive at the processing facility with literally millions of other NON-CAGE FREE eggs, the company must first demonstrate their ability to segregate cage-free from non-cage free.

The company must provide USDA a written plan detailing how they will maintain the segregation and identity of eggs for an identified cage-free source flock from production through storage, transport, processing and packaging.

During processing, USDA assures only eligible eggs are packaged into cage-free cartons bearing a USDA shield.