



## **Free Range Eggs**

You may be aware that in December 2016, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) instructed farmers that poultry must be kept indoors on a temporary basis because of the risk of avian influenza being spread from wild bird populations.

DEFRA has looked at the ongoing risks posed by avian influenza and from 28 February 2017 will be moving to a more targeted approach. This will require high levels of biosecurity, but will only mandate housing or full netting of outdoor areas in locations where the risk is assessed to be unacceptably high (called Higher Risk Areas).

Eggs and meat from poultry which are either outside the Higher Risk Areas and not housed, or are within the Higher Risk Areas and have access to fully netted range areas and comply with all other requirements laid down by DEFRA can be marketed as free range after 28 February 2017. Eggs from poultry kept housed after 28 February 2017 cannot be marketed as free range. Working with local vets, each farmer will determine the most appropriate course of action for them depending on the local circumstances. The uncertainty about further outbreaks means that this may change depending on the risk to the flock at any point in time. A similar risk assessment was carried out in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

This continuing situation is putting farmers under considerable pressure so the British Egg Industry Council, who endorse the Lion Quality code of practice, has requested that all members, regardless of their circumstances, apply stickers to packs of Free Range eggs advising that the eggs have been laid by hens temporarily housed in barns for their welfare. Brakes wish to support these farmers and the welfare of their flocks and therefore our Free Range eggs will shortly carry this advice until the risk to hens from avian influenza has been reduced.

As supplies of free range eggs will continue to be limited whilst many flocks remain housed for their own welfare, where appropriate, food businesses that make menu claims referring to Free Range eggs will need to ensure that information is provided to their customers to avoid them being misled.

Further information from the BEIC can be found at <https://www.egginfo.co.uk/news/british-egg-industry-council-concerned-protect-hens>

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