

[Forum Reply] Traders must be able to substantiate 'organic', 'cage-free' claims

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We refer to Mr Cheng Choon Fei's letter (Look into high prices, claims of 'free-range', 'cage-free' eggs; Sept 29).

Food sold in Singapore must meet our food safety requirements.

However, traders may provide additional information on how the food is produced to differentiate their products, for example with "organic" or "cage-free" labels.

These traders have the responsibility to ensure that they can substantiate their claims, for instance by producing documentation such as organic certificates.

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) adopts the guidelines and standard established by the international

food standards body, the Codex Alimentarius Commission, for the use of claims such as "organic".

Under the food regulations, food labelled with claims of being organically produced must be certified by a duly constituted certification body under an inspection and certification system that complies with the Codex guidelines.

AVA will take enforcement action against importers if any food product is found to be falsely labelled.

As for eggs, poultry farms that produce fresh table eggs for sale in Singapore need to be accredited or licensed by AVA.

Import of "free-range" eggs is currently restricted due to

biosecurity concerns, as the poultry can access an outdoor range with exposure to wild birds that may carry the avian influenza virus.

However, "cage-free" eggs from poultry that are kept in enclosed barn-style houses are allowed for sale in Singapore.

The assurance of food safety and quality requires the combined effort of the Government, the food industry and the consumer.

Members of the public can play their part by being discerning consumers.

Consumers who have queries on the claims on food labels may contact the companies for more information. Members of the public may also submit feedback to AVA at www.ava.gov.sg if they suspect these claims to be false.

Astrid Yeo (Dr)

Group Director, Regulatory

Administration Group

Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority

Straits Times Online, 9 October 2018

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Astrid Yeo (Dr)

Group Director, Regulatory Administration Group, Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority

Original forum letter

The Straits Times (print), 29 Sep 2018, pA40

Look into high prices, claims of 'free-range', 'cage-free' eggs

At our supermarkets, it is common to find various types of eggs that command different prices.

Recently, some caught my attention because of the huge difference in price.

For example, a carton of six cage-free eggs or organic eggs costs \$3.20, while a carton of 10 regular eggs costs \$2.65.

The unit price difference between the former and the latter is a whopping 100 per cent, or 0.533 cent each compared with 0.26 cent.

The Consumers Association of Singapore should investigate how

the cage-free and organic suppliers justify charging such high prices.

The Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) regulates poultry products, including eggs, due to diseases such as bird flu.

That means all eggs sold in Singapore must be from chickens raised in an enclosed and restricted environment and which are not allowed to roam freely.

With such restrictions in place, how do eggs labelled "cage-free" or "free-range" make it to our shelves?

As there is no way for consumers

to verify the information and details on cage or barn space, consumers are at the mercy of these suppliers.

Another problem is that the feed for hens is not regulated by AVA, and any supplier can claim that its eggs are special without any obligation to prove such statements.

Selling quality eggs at a high price requires transparency from suppliers, and consumers have the right to know more about their eggs and poultry.

Cheng Choon Fei

Straits Times Online, 29 September 2018

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PUBLISHED SEP 29, 2018, 5:00 AM SGT

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Cheng Choon Fei

A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Straits Times on September 29, 2018, with the headline 'Look into high prices, claims of 'free-range', 'cage-free' eggs'. [Print Edition](#) | [Subscribe](#)