

Sunny side up for sales of ethically-positioned eggs

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Today, more British consumers than ever before are enjoying their full English breakfasts with a clear conscience. Latest research from MINTEL finds the popularity of cheap battery eggs starting to crack, as consumers scramble for ever more boxes of free-range, barn and organic eggs. With their own health as well as that of the chicken in mind, consumers bought some 2.04 billion free range, barn and organic eggs last year, up from just 1.64 billion in 2002 - an impressive 24% increase. Sales of free range eggs in particular have really started to boil over, rising some 31% since 2002 alone.

Although last year battery or laying cage eggs accounted for almost 6 in 10 eggs sold (59%), volume sales of these less welfare friendly eggs fell 8% from 3.19 billion to 2.93 billion between 2002 and 2005.

"The widespread uptake of ethically-positioned eggs by both retailers and consumers is testament to the emotive nature of this particular market. People are becoming increasingly concerned about the way animals are reared and more aware of how environment can impact on the flavour of the food. As such consumers are increasingly turning their backs on eggs from laying cage hens, which are often housed in poor conditions. In turn they have embraced free-range eggs from hens living in more agreeable surroundings, while organic eggs are seen as healthier, as the hens do not come into contact with chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or hormones. When it comes to buying eggs, as well as improved taste, British consumers are clearly looking for choices that are better for their own health, while not compromising that of the chicken," comments Claire Birks, senior market analyst at MINTEL.

Long live the great British fry-up

Despite busy lifestyles we still find time for eggs in the morning. Breakfast is one of the key occasions when people eat eggs, with over half (52%) of British adults indulging, whether it be scrambled or poached, fried or boiled.

"The traditional English breakfast has a universal appeal. This is a meal that is served all day, across a wide variety of eating establishments from truckers' caf  s to the most exclusive hotels. It is both representative of a working class staple, and a luxury weekend retreat, and is perhaps the only recipe that transcends both the age and gender divide," comments Claire Birks.

Cracking good sales

Last year spend on all types of eggs hit half a billion pounds (  514 million) for the first time ever, with Brits clearly developing a taste for larger eggs as the combined share of volume accounted for by large and very large eggs increased from 38% in 2003 to 43% in 2005.

This year, Brits are set to spend   526 million on eggs, up 28% on 2001 figures. What is more, volume sales are expected to smash through the 5 billion egg mark by the end of the year. This equates to an impressive 90 eggs a year for every man, woman and child in the UK today - almost two a week.

"Value growth has outpaced volume as consumers have traded up to more expensive barn, free range and organic eggs, as well as buying larger sizes. But this trend has been tempered by intense price competition between the leading retailers, in a market dominated by own label brands," explained Claire Birks.

MINTEL forecasts that the UK egg market will grow by an estimated 17% to reach   617 million over the period 2006-11. With the imminent launch of the black Lion Quality logo - revealed on the egg once boiled properly - hopefully the billions of eggs sold in coming years will be cooked to perfection!