



British Lion eggs marketing history

The UK egg industry has been responsible for some of the most famous and successful marketing campaigns of the 20th and 21st centuries.

You can find out more here about the history of egg marketing since World War II, including the famous Go to Work on an Egg campaign of the 1950s and 60s, and about the more recent relaunch of the British Lion mark which has helped the UK industry return to growth.

This case study covers:

History of egg marketing

- Background of egg marketing 1928 onwards
- Go to Work on an Egg

The British Egg Industry Council and the return of the British Lion mark

- The salmonella scare
- Planning the future of UK eggs
- The return of the Lion
- Increasing egg consumption
- Results/evaluation

History of UK egg marketing 1928-1986

Background

The business of marketing eggs brings with it certain problems. On the surface, there's not a lot of difference between eggs, and without any form of marking it is almost impossible to see an egg's quality or origin.

In the early years of the 20th century, egg production was largely a sideline to other farming operations and there were few specialist egg producers. This meant that prices were subject to sharp fluctuations and there was strong competition from overseas. UK egg producers wanted to differentiate their product from that of other countries and encourage the public to buy British.

1928: The National Mark Scheme

In 1928, the Government and the Farmers' Union set up a voluntary scheme to try to provide a quality guarantee for a range of home-produced goods, including eggs. The 'National Mark Scheme' was the first organised attempt to provide the market with reliably-graded, high quality, home-produced eggs.

1939-1945: World War II

During the war, foodstuffs such as eggs were rationed to ensure everyone received their fair share, and consumers were given vouchers which they used to buy eggs. A new organisation, the National Egg Distributors' Association Limited (NEDAL) was set up to supply eggs. As the war progressed, a shortage of animal feed meant that the number of hens declined, forcing egg rationing to remain in place until 1953.

1957-1971: British Egg Marketing Board

The British Egg Marketing Board was set up with the aim of bringing stability to the market so that egg producers could get the best possible returns and consumers could be provided with a regular supply of high quality, home-produced eggs at reasonable prices. The BEMB obtained its funds from three sources: egg sales, Government subsidy and income from taxes which egg producers had to pay.

Under the BEMB, 'first quality' eggs were required by law to be stamped to show their grade and with a number that could be used to locate the packing station from which the eggs originated. To this, the BEMB added its own trademark – a Lion. The 'Little Lion' became a well-known symbol, popular with consumers, and appeared

regularly on advertising and promotional material throughout the BEMB's lifetime. British egg producers with more than 50 hens had to be registered, and the BEMB was obliged to accept for sale all eggs offered to it.

The Board took the following steps to help promote British eggs:

- Operated a national price structure
- Disposed of surpluses by processing them into egg products (such as dried egg, used in food manufacture)
- Helped distribution by movement of regional surpluses
- Ensured national quality standards for packing stations
- Promoted the sale of British eggs through national advertising, sales promotion and public relations.

The advertising slogan "Go to Work on an Egg" was introduced and featured on TV ads with comedian Tony Hancock. The slogan developed into one of the most popular and memorable advertising campaigns of all time. Advertising and other BEMB activities saw egg consumption increase by about 14 per cent between 1957 and 1970. For more information on the Go to Work on an Egg campaign, [click here](#).

In later years a problem arose as improved methods of production meant that yields (the number of eggs per bird) began to increase. Although the BEMB was obliged to buy all eggs offered to it, producers were allowed to sell their eggs elsewhere – and the Board became a 'dumping ground' for the eggs which producers could not sell elsewhere.

The Government removed the requirement to stamp eggs in 1968.

1971-1986: Eggs Authority

The BEMB was replaced by the Eggs Authority in 1971 and under this new direction, producers had to find their own markets. The Lion symbol was also dropped at this time. The Authority's main objective was to support British egg producers by positioning eggs as an acceptable food in contemporary society. The Authority's activities included advertising with slogans such as "Crack a Meal Today", "Thank Goodness For Eggs", "Go Smash an Egg" and "The Egg Lover". At the same time, research was conducted and the issues of diet and health were raised, particularly that of cholesterol intake, and new processed egg products were developed for the catering and consumer markets.

Despite these promotional campaigns, however, egg consumption declined during the 1970s and 80s due to changing consumer lifestyles, including a decline in cooked breakfasts and home baking.

In 1973, the UK entered the European Economic Community and British eggs became subject to the EEC Egg Marketing Regulations governing quality, grade-sizing, labelling and packaging.

In 1985 the Eggs Authority was reviewed by the government. The review uncovered a lack of support from the egg industry itself, and the Authority was abolished in 1986, replaced by the British Egg Industry Council, a voluntary organisation.

1986–Present Day: British Egg Industry Council (BEIC)

The BEIC is funded by voluntary contributions from egg producers and packers and is made up of the major trade associations from the different subdivisions and geographical regions of the UK industry. It funds the BEIS (British Egg Information Service) to handle the promotion and marketing of Lion eggs. When it was launched by the industry in 1986, its budget was around £200,000 a year, substantially less than that of the previous bodies.

The salmonella scare

In 1988, with the market already in long-term decline, the British egg industry was forced to face the most challenging issue in its history.

On 3 December, during an impromptu interview for ITN, Edwina Currie, then Junior Health Minister, stated that: "Most of the egg production in this country, sadly, is now infected with salmonella."

Although a new type of salmonella bacteria had emerged and caught the industry unprepared, Ms Currie's remark was blown out of all proportion in the media, sparking the biggest food scare British agriculture had ever seen.

Panic took hold amongst British consumers and sales of eggs dropped by 60 per cent virtually overnight, leaving the industry devastated. Despite the drop in sales, hens continued to produce eggs, creating a logistical problem as the surplus had to be disposed of somewhere.

Despite Government measures to improve egg safety and small-scale marketing campaigns to reassure consumers, egg sales continued to fall over the next ten years by approximately 8 per cent year-on-year, leaving the industry in dire straits. With negative media coverage continuing until the mid 1990s, drastic action was required.

Planning the future of UK eggs

In the mid-1990s, the British Egg Industry Council (BEIC) began planning the activities which it hoped would save the UK egg industry. In 1997, the BEIS undertook a major consumer research programme utilising a variety of different types of research, both qualitative and quantitative. At the same time vaccine manufacturers were developing a vaccine which could prevent hens contracting salmonella.

Consumer research programme

Stage I: Family Food Panel

Family Food Panel 'in-home' quantitative research, found that between 1990 and 1995 egg usage declined fastest within the following segments:

- Larger households (4+ people)
- C1/C2 socio grade households
- Households with children (particularly those with 0-5 year olds)
- Non/part-time working housewives
- 17-24 year old consumers
- At main meal occasions, particularly at breakfast.

From this research, the top priority segments of the market, those in the most urgent need of addressing, were identified as:

- Housewives with children
- Pre-family households/17-24 year olds

Stage II: Focus Group Research

BEIS research took place among groups from all over the country. One of the key findings was that people were still concerned about health issues.

The following are a selection of the opinions of consumers who attended the focus groups:

- Health concerns about eggs have become 'folklore'. There is much misunderstanding and many misconceptions about eggs and, in particular, how many is it 'safe/OK' to eat per week.
- While some older people see eggs as very versatile and quick to cook, convenience does not necessarily

mean just time. Eggs are not 'failsafe', i.e. you can't just leave them to cook - they need constant supervision.

- With more autonomous eating (eating on your own), different meals at the same meal occasion, and growth in lighter meals and snacking, eggs would seem an obvious choice, however, they are not always the first food that comes to mind. Also, people are not being encouraged to eat eggs, but are being encouraged to eat lots of other foods.
- With the changing role of the housewife, eggs are not seen as a 'must have' in the cupboard by many households.
- Light/occasional users use eggs in fairly restricted ways, lacking ideas and inspirations. Some people, particularly the young, found them bland.
- Although eggs do fulfil many consumers' desired list of criteria for modern foods(quick, convenient, easy, tasty, value for money, versatile, nutritious and filling) they have to compete with 90s alternatives (microwave foods, ready meals etc)

Stage III: Consumer Omnibus Survey

Consumer omnibus research quantified some of the information generated by the focus groups.

1. The ways in which consumers use eggs were very similar across all groups and segments, with the top five ways being: scrambled, fried, hard-boiled for salads, omelettes and soft-boiled eggs.
2. The key target segments – mothers of young children and 17-24 year olds – were still among the heaviest egg users, which explains why they had such a great impact in the decline of egg usage/sales.
3. When suggested advertising/promotional messages were presented to them, the target segments displayed overall a greater disposition to use eggs more often than the other segments.
4. The top-rated message most likely to encourage people to use eggs more often was "Eggs are low in fat, high in protein, and good for all the family".

The new salmonella vaccine

At the same time as the consumer research programme, a new salmonella vaccine which protected laying hens against salmonella (and therefore stopped the bacteria passing into eggs) had been developed and was being trialled. Although British standards were by now among the highest in the world, many producers felt that investment should be made to further improve safety.

The return of the Lion

In 1998, the majority of UK producers and packers agreed to support the BEIC with a voluntary investment of £8 million to re-launch British eggs: £4 million on a stringent new Code of Practice including compulsory salmonella vaccination, and £4 million on a new promotional campaign to restore confidence and increase consumption.

The BEIC launched a new version of the Lion Quality mark, popular with consumers in the fifties and sixties, onto egg boxes. The Lion indicated to consumers that the eggs inside the box had been produced to the new Code of Practice, which set higher standards of hygiene and animal welfare than required by UK or EU Law. The new, modern Lion was registered as a trademark of the BEIC and could only be used by egg producers and packers who signed up to the new Lion Quality Code of Practice and the Lion marketing programme. The stringent new Lion Quality Code of Practice was launched in Autumn 1998 and was welcomed by food safety experts, who had previously been critical of the industry.

New, contemporary style TV advertisements were launched in February 1999, with the theme "Fast food. And Good For You". The key target market was housewives with young children as the consumer research programme had shown that this was the priority group to reach to reverse the long-term decline in consumption. The ads reminded consumers how quick and versatile eggs could be, whilst reinforcing their image as a nutritious food.

The BEIC met with all the major UK egg retailers and informed them of the benefits of the Lion scheme. All of the retailers agreed to specify Lion Quality eggs and all used the new Lion logo on their packs – a first for a food quality mark.

In January 2000, the 16-month programme to vaccinate all Lion Quality hens against salmonella was completed. The Lion Quality symbol was returned to the shells of eggs for the first time since the 1960s to reassure consumers that any egg bearing the Lion symbol had come from a hen vaccinated against salmonella. Agriculture Minister Nick Brown publicly endorsed the industry's efforts.

The "Fast food. And good for you" campaign continued during 2000 & 2001, supplemented by more specific messages to 'Look for the Lion' on eggs and egg boxes.

Increasing egg consumption

During 2001, consumer research (via focus groups) showed that the British Egg Information Service had met its objective of restoring key consumers' confidence in British Lion eggs. Most consumers were aware of the Lion mark and were no longer concerned about the food safety status of eggs.

The new challenge was to contemporise the image of eggs. While the first stage of the Lion campaign had removed 'blockages' to purchase, consumers still needed to be motivated to fit eggs into their meal repertoire – the prevailing attitude had moved from concern to ambivalence. Some people felt that eggs were bland and boring, others saw them as old-fashioned and many consumers linked them with accompaniments they perceived as unhealthy, such as fry-ups, bread and chips.

The BEIS research showed, however, that when consumers were shown new recipes using eggs in modern meals, they found this very motivating as eggs could meet their needs for quick, healthy, fast food.

A new marketing campaign was developed, continuing with the umbrella theme 'Fast food. And good for you' but with new TV advertising using the storyline 'Eggs make a meal out of anything'. The new executions featured four modern family situations, ranging from a divorced dad to student flatsharers, all facing the problem of an 'empty' fridge – but with eggs coming to the rescue. All the meal solutions were quick, healthy and modern, featuring dishes such as omelettes and frittatas, with ingredients such as peppers and pitta bread – a big move away from boiled eggs and soldiers!

The new TV ads were supported by the launch of a new website – www.eggrecipes.co.uk – and a long-term campaign by BEIS to provide leading food writers with a range of contemporary recipes for eggs, as well as ensuring that the health benefits of eggs were understood.

At the same time, the BEIS continued to provide in-depth information about the Lion Quality scheme, particularly to opinion-formers such as health professionals and environmental health officers, as well as reminding both retail and catering customers of the need to specify British Lion eggs.

Another phenomenon that affected the perception of eggs and short-term egg sales was the controversial Atkins diet, which in 2003 purportedly led to a rise in sales of about 4%. While this effect may have been due to a somewhat dubious association, with question marks over the long-term effect of the diet itself, the egg had certainly re-established itself in public consciousness as a high-protein, high convenience food.

By 2005 egg sales were showing a steady rise and the British egg industry was receiving accolades as a unique agricultural success story – so much so that Edwina Currie herself endorsed the success of the British Lion scheme in overcoming salmonella in British eggs. "The British egg industry has spent years putting its house in order and unlike many other industries, they've done it without subsidies," Mrs Currie said.

With consumer research showing awareness of the Lion mark at more than 80%, the industry decided that the next phase of its marketing programme should focus on developing a strong character for British Lion eggs. New advertising in 2006 followed the theme 'Lion eggs. So very British' with a series of humorous TV and magazine executions highlighting British idiosyncrasies such as queuing, Wimbledon, Bank Holidays and even Page 3!

Since 2007, the Lion egg marketing campaign has continued to promote the generic benefits of eggs – health and convenience – as well as the specific benefits of the Lion Quality mark.

In 2007 the 'Eggs make a meal out of anything' TV ad campaign returned with a new execution featuring a low-calorie Pizza Omelette. The benefits of eggs for weight loss have been highlighted by the BEIS since then, with research showing that the satiating benefits of eggs can help people feel fuller for longer.

An on-going campaign to dispel the myth that the cholesterol in eggs had a direct link with raised blood cholesterol and heart disease culminated in the British Heart Foundation joining other UK health advisory groups in removing limits on egg consumption in 2009.

In 2010 eggs were dubbed a 'superfood' with a new research review showing that they are one of the most nutrient-dense foods available.

For up-to-date information on current Lion egg marketing activity, see the news section of the [Britegg](#) website.

British Lion marketing campaign results/evaluation

Measuring egg consumption and sales of Lion brand eggs

Following the relaunch of the Lion mark and the first year of the new Lion marketing campaign, The National Food Survey, a Government survey showing consumption of various products including eggs, showed an increase of 5% in egg consumption in 2000 on the previous year.

The overall UK egg market has continued to rise gradually since then. Between 1998 and 2009, the egg market grew from 9.8bn eggs per year to almost 11bn eggs per year. Lion eggs share of the total market is around 85%.

Within the retail market Lion eggs' share has risen from approximately 60% in 1998 to 95% in 2010.

Media coverage of eggs

In the initial three years of the Lion campaign (1998-2001), media coverage of eggs moved from largely negative to overwhelmingly positive, with headlines such as: 'Give eggs a break' and 'The good news about eggs'.

This has continued with eggs now being referred to as a 'superfood' and the Lion campaign as an 'agricultural success story'.

Recognition of the Lion and what it stands for

Consumer research conducted in 2001 showed that 83% of all consumers and 94% of those seeing the BEIC advertising recognised the Lion. In focus groups throughout the next few years, spontaneous mentions and understanding of the Lion 'guarantee' replaced previous concerns over egg safety. In 2006 recognition of the Lion rose to 88%, where it has remained.

The Lion mark was awarded Superbrand status as 'one to watch' in 2006 – a rare accolade for a food quality mark.

Egg safety

In May 2001, less than three years after the launch of the Lion scheme, the Government's Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food reported 'a real success story' with human cases of salmonella halved, reflecting the dramatic fall in the levels of salmonella in eggs.

In 2004 the Food Standards Agency tested more than 28,000 British eggs and no salmonella was found in any of them.

In 2006 a major EU report on the presence of salmonella in the environment on egg-laying farms showed the UK as having one of the best records in Europe, with the British Lion scheme's success in overcoming salmonella acclaimed by a range of experts as an example to other countries. A further EU survey in 2008 showed that the UK figures had continued to improve even further.