

As Egg Fears Mount, Farmers Launch Reassurance Campaign

Buys National Newspaper Ads and Eyes Radio, Digital Outreach

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NEW YORK (AdAge.com) -- As the number of recalled eggs escalates to nearly half a billion, the egg-farmers trade organization is launching a campaign to tell consumers their eggs are not only still incredible -- they're also safely edible.

Today's American Egg Board ad assured consumers that the potentially affected eggs have been removed from store shelves.

The American Egg Board today took out full-page ads in major newspapers including The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and USA Today to try and tamp down rising fears around America's favorite breakfast food. The ads call attention to the fact that "the potentially affected eggs, which make up less than 1% of all U.S. eggs, have been removed from store shelves" and end with the reminder that "thoroughly cooked means thoroughly safe." Consumers are driven from the print ads to a website, eggsafety.org.

Kevin Burkum, senior VP-marketing for the American Egg Board, told Ad Age the messages are "aimed at educating consumers on the safety of eggs and how to properly cook them." He added that the organization is also looking at expanding the print campaign to radio and digital efforts to get the message out. "We upped our investment in search last week to help people find Egg Safety Center's eggsafety.org," said Mr. Burkum. "We're also monitoring consumer sentiment online, as well as posting updates about the recall via Facebook and Twitter. We also distributed a video of a spokesperson talking about egg safety, including how to thoroughly cook your eggs."

All of that increased messaging likely translates into an unexpected spike in the organization's usual advertising outlay; last year it spent just more than \$13 million on U.S. measured media, according to Kantar Media figures. The American Egg Board's agency roster includes: Grey, New York, for creative; Publicis Groupe's Starcom for media duties; Edelman for public relations; and Whittman Hart for interactive.

The recall began Aug. 13 at Wright County Egg in Iowa and within days it became clear that a variety of brands distributed by that company were contaminated. Two of the country's biggest retailers, Walmart and Costco, have been affected by the recall and forced to take thousands of cartons off the shelves.

Four of Walmart's egg suppliers (Dean Foods, Sparboe Farms, Hillandale Farms and Cal-Maine Foods) and one Sam's Club supplier (NuCal Foods) announced recalls of eggs that were sourced from or linked to Wright County Eggs, resulting in some 630 Walmart stores in 20 states yanking products.

Said Walmart in a statement: "Customer safety is a top priority at Walmart and Sam's Club and that includes offering safe, high-quality foods at the most affordable prices. We are concerned

about the nationwide salmonella outbreak linked to shell eggs and are monitoring this situation very closely." The retailer also took care to note that its own private label brand is safe. "Walmart's Great Value brand is not impacted by the recall announced earlier by Wright County Eggs."

Costco so far has called more than 200,000 customers to warn them of the recall and is asking that the eggs be returned to stores for a refund.

For its part, the Egg Board is staying positive: "We did some consumer research over the weekend which indicated the recall wasn't going to have any long-term effects, but that's something we'll continue to monitor," said Mr. Burkum.

Regardless of whether the egg recall expands, consumer buzz so far seems to be mounting. According to Nielsen data, the egg recall in its first week has generated more than double the conversation across a sample of social-media sources such as blogs, forums and Twitter than the peanut-butter scare did earlier this year.