Cathy Harley, HFS0902

Artifact

My 6-bedroom collegetown apartment has 2 refrigerators. Each one of these contains a feature that I am fairly questionable about---specific shelves for eggs and butter.

Critique

To go into detail on one of the shelves, there are slots for 14 eggs. The dimensions of the egg component of the shelf are 14x5x5 inches. The dimensions of the butter shelf are 4x4x6.5 inches. The egg shelves are uncovered and the butter shelf has a sign on it reading “Butter”. The affordance of the egg shelves is relatively obvious and also relatively limited. The grooves are the perfect size for eggs. The only other refrigerator item that I could possibly think to fit in that spot would be a kiwi, or certain tomatoes. However, all of the standardized spots and American cultural conventions immediately led me to think that eggs belonged in these grooves. The shelves are quite visible in the fridge -they are on the top shelf of the door. It is also very visible how many eggs are still available in your fridge if you store your eggs in this shelf -helpful if you are running to the grocery store.

However, the first problem that I see with the egg shelf is the number of grooves that it holds---14. After 20 years of living in the United States (the market in which this refrigerator is sold in), I have only seen or purchased eggs in cartons of 12 or 6, and rarely, the small 4 egg carton. Having slots for 20 eggs seems fairly unreasonable, unless people find themselves in the rare scenario where they purchase a new carton of 12 eggs when they still have 8 eggs left, or they decide to buy a carton of 12 eggs and 2 of the rare 4 egg cartons. This could also work for the American household that raises their own chickens, and therefore does not buy their eggs in standardized packaging or in standardized amounts. However, for our purposes of college students on the third floor of an apartment building, the prospect of owning chickens is relatively low.

The next argument I have against the egg holder is the actual space and dimension that it takes up. The size of the standard Wegman’s dozen egg carton that I have in my refrigerator is 10.5x3x2.5 inches. If the shelf were flat and still of the above dimensions (and didn’t contain all of the hollow space that exists in the plastic structure of the shelves), they could easily fit two of the dozen egg containers, with still a few inches of room on the side. This would increase the egg capacity of the shelves by 10 eggs, nearly doubling it. Even more, manufacturing the intricate cuts of this shelving unit probably took more material than would have been used in a standard shelf in its place. This could have definitely upped the material and manufacturing cost of the refrigerator.

We personally do not use the egg shelves at all. For one, we don’t share all of our food, so we all have separate eggs. Putting the eggs on the shelf would make it quite difficult to differentiate one person’s eggs from another’s. We have tried to make use of the space, and have managed to fit 6 small yogurts along the bottom of the slots, and a clove of garlic in one of the other egg holders. The yogurt often falls out when we open the fridge.

The lack of an egg carton can present various other problems as well. With a carton, if a recipe calls for multiple eggs, the entire carton can be transported to and from the fridge to the cooking location. It is easy to hold and contains the eggs without them slipping out. However, if one needed to carry four separate eggs from the fridge without a container, one would definitely risk dropping the egg. An extra fridge trip may even be needed. The carton also contains very valuable information—like the expiration date of the eggs and their batch number if there is a salmonella recall. The packaging also indicates the size of the eggs if you are baking with them and did not purchase them yourself and have no judgment or a medium or extra-large egg.

In terms of the butter shelf, it contains a sign, which immediately an indicator of a design weakness. The dimensions of a pound of butter are 2.5x2.5x4.75 inches. This fits into the shelf with plenty of room to spare. However, there is not enough room for a second pound, or even room that makes sense to fit an extra stick. It is overall just wasted space.
Also, the butter holder only conveniently fits butter-butter, not Country Crock or other alternatives. Since all of the users of one of our fridges are solely Country Crock users, they put cheese into the butter holder. However, this is awkward, because now the cheese is completely mislabeled as butter.

Both of these shelves are completely useless for anyone who is a vegan, dislikes eggs, doesn't eat butter, or is struggling to cut down on their cholesterol. That cuts down on a huge amount of users. In conclusion, the egg and butter shelves are a poor design decision and completely useless to most people.

My design suggestion? A standard shelf in the fridge would provide all of the egg and butter services, as well as many more.