

The World Society for the Protection of Animals

Finding Animal Friendly Food

The Availability of Humanely Labeled Foods
in U.S. Grocery Stores



WSPA

World Society for the Protection of Animals

Introduction



American consumers are faced with an ever-increasing array of food product labels making various claims having to do with human health and nutrition, environmental protection, and animal welfare. Many Americans want to choose humanely when they select a package from the grocery store shelf but don't know which stores carry animal-friendly foods or what to look for on the product label.

Today, most food offered for sale in major U.S. chain supermarkets is from animals raised under intensive confinement on large, factory-style farms. These animals are typically denied fresh air and sunlight and given very limited freedom to move and perform natural behaviors. In many cases, they are subjected to surgical mutilations – like having their tails or beaks removed – to prevent injuries from the inevitable fighting that occurs with such gross overcrowding.

Public opinion polls show that Americans care about how animals raised for food are treated, and that people are willing to pay more for food that comes from humanely raised animals. In a poll commissioned by the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) in late

2007, 68% of adult Americans said the humane treatment of farm animals raised for food is important to them.¹ In addition, more than three-quarters of a sample of restaurant customers identified humane treatment of animals as an issue of concern in a 2008 survey of restaurant social responsibility.²

Nearly half of those responding to a 2007 national telephone survey conducted by Oklahoma State University said they consider the well-being of farm animals when purchasing meat,³ and 58% of respondents to the 2007 WSPA poll indicated that it is important to them to be able to buy humanely labeled meat and eggs in their local supermarket. Approximately one-quarter of respondents to the WSPA survey said they had purchased “organic” or “free range” food products in the previous year.⁴

Product labels are the preferred source of information about how a food was produced, suggesting consumers want this information when they are about to make their purchasing decisions.⁵ But deciphering food labels – given the number of claims, seals, or logos that signify the product meets certain standards – can be challenging, even for the most informed shopper.



Most breeding pigs are kept in crates where they cannot even turn around, unless the animals are raised under a humane label.



Pork without a humane label typically comes from pigs raised indoors, on slatted floors with no straw.

What is “Humanely Labeled Food”?

To demystify labeling claims in terms of animal welfare, WSPA has developed a humane food classification system (Table 1). Labeling claims have been rated as either GOOD, BETTER or BEST, depending on the level of animal welfare required by the label standard. These stan-

dards are set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or by a third-party food certification program. Three humane food certification programs currently operate in the U.S., all of which are administered by animal welfare organizations.⁶

Table 1. Humane Food Labels

A GOOD Start

** These labels cover only one aspect of animal care and a third party does not verify compliance with the standards.*

“Cage free” (eggs)

“Free range” (eggs, chicken, duck, goose, turkey)

“Grass fed” (dairy, beef, lamb)

Even BETTER

** These labels feature a higher level of animal welfare, but the standards are either not verified by a third party or cover only a limited aspect of animal care.*

“Free range” (beef, bison, lamb, pork)

“Pasture raised” (dairy, eggs, chicken, turkey, beef, bison, lamb, pork)

“USDA organic” (dairy, eggs, chicken, turkey, beef, bison, lamb, pork)

The BEST Options

** These labels cover multiple aspects of animal care and an independent third party verifies compliance with the standards.*

“American Humane Certified” (dairy, eggs, chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, pork)

“Animal Welfare Approved” (dairy, eggs, chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, pork)

“Certified Humane” (dairy, eggs, chicken, turkey, beef, lamb, pork)

Not Necessarily Humane

“No antibiotics used” / “No hormones administered” – The government does not conduct testing to verify these claims. Hormones are prohibited in the raising of poultry, so this labeling claim is meaningless when used on chicken and turkey products. The “no antibiotics used” label suggests the animal wasn’t raised on a factory farm but by itself is not an indicator of high animal welfare.

“Natural” – This label currently has no relevance to animal welfare whatsoever. It merely indicates that the product was minimally processed and contains no dyes or preservatives. WSPA has recommended that this claim be re-named “minimally processed.”

“Naturally raised” – The USDA has proposed but not finalized a definition for this claim. Producers are using this label to indicate that the animal was raised without the use of antibiotics and hormones and had been given only vegetarian feed. WSPA is opposing the proposed standard because it does not require freedom of movement and access to fresh air and sunlight.

Surveying U.S. Grocery Stores

WSPA developed a survey of food retailers to determine the availability of humanely labeled foods in U.S. grocery stores. The sample of retailers used was based on the top 25 supermarket corporations by annual sales, as identified by the *Progressive Grocer* in May 2007.⁷ Wholesale membership clubs, such as Costco and Sam's Club, were excluded. After the research project was initiated it was learned that 2 of the companies had recently merged with others of the top 25, resulting in a sample of 23 regional and national supermarket corporations.

A survey form to document the number and type of humanely labeled products was developed and field-tested in the Boston, Massachusetts area. WSPA staff and volunteers conducted the surveys throughout the country; stores were surveyed in a mix of rural, suburban, and urban areas of 34 states, including Alaska and Hawaii.

A total of 223 completed surveys were returned, 32 of which were discarded for various reasons,⁸ leaving a final sample of 191 individual stores. On average, the study surveyed 8 stores belonging to each of the 23 supermarket corporations. For the Wal-Mart and Target chains, only supercenters that carry a full range of grocery products were surveyed.



Unless the package contains a humane label, eggs likely come from hens confined to small cages.

The survey recorded products in four categories – dairy, eggs, unprocessed meat and poultry, and processed meat and poultry (bacon, ham, hot dogs, etc.). Prepared meals and frozen meals or entrees were excluded from the survey, and the accuracy of all labels was verified through Internet searches and/or telephone calls to producers and retailers. (The survey did not address the availability of meat and dairy alternatives, such as soy-based products.)

In scoring the surveys, one point was awarded for each GOOD product recorded, two points for each BETTER product, and three for each BEST product, thereby accounting for both quantity and quality of the food selection. Total scores were calculated for individual stores, and these scores averaged to obtain an overall score for each of the 23 supermarket corporations.

How the Stores Rated

Whole Foods Market scored highest in the survey, offering twice as many humanely labeled products per store as the company ranked second, Wegman's Food Markets (Table 2).⁹ Considerable variation was found among the stores owned by an individual company. H.E. Butt's Central Market and HEB Plus! stores, along with Kroger's City Market stores, scored high, but the averages for their respective companies were brought down by lower-scoring stores within the corporation (such as the Fry's chain for Kroger and the HEB chain for H.E. Butt Grocery Co.).

Wal-Mart Stores, the world's largest food retailer, and Stater Bros. Markets, a southern California supermarket chain, scored lowest of the 23 supermarket corporations. However, the lowest individual chain in the survey was Delhaize America's Food Lion, which had two stores offering only a single product each. Delhaize's overall score was raised by its Hannaford chain, which offered an average of 15 products per store.

To test for regional differences, WSPA compared the scores of a sub-sample of 15 New England stores – 3 locations each for Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Hannaford (Delhaize America), Shaw's (Supervalu), and Stop & Shop (Ahold USA) – with the national scores for their respective corporations. In each case, the New England stores scored significantly higher.

Table 2. U.S. Grocery Store Rankings

| <u>Rank</u> | <u>Corporation/Chains</u> | <u>Locations</u> | <u>Score</u> |
|--------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Whole Foods Market | Northeast, South, West | 76 |
| 2 | Wegman's Food Markets | Northeast, South | 39 |
| 3 | Ruddick Corp. (Harris Teeter) | South | 36 |
| 4 | H.E. Butt Grocery Co. (Central Market, HEB, HEB Plus!) | South | 33 |
| 5 | Kroger Co. (City Market, Fred Meyer, Fry's, King, Scooper's, Kroger, Ralph's, Smith's Food & Drug) | Midwest, South, West | 31 |
| 5 | Publix Super Markets, Inc. | South | 31 |
| 7 | Hy-Vee Food Stores, Inc. | Midwest | 29 |
| 8 | Meijer, Inc. | Midwest, South | 24 |
| 9 | Safeway, Inc. (Carr's, Safeway, Von's) | Midwest, South, West | 23 |
| 9 | Trader Joe's Co. | Northeast, Midwest, West | 23 |
| 11 | Ahold USA, Inc. (Giant Foods Stores, Stop & Shop) | Northeast, South | 22 |
| 11 | Giant Eagle, Inc. | Northeast, Midwest, South | 22 |
| 13 | Target Corp. (SuperTarget Center) | Midwest, South, West | 21 |
| 14 | Supervalu, Inc. (Acme, Albertson's, Farm Fresh, Festival Foods, Jewel-Osco, Shaw's, Shopper's Food) | Northeast, Midwest, West | 20 |
| 15 | Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co. (A&P, Pathmark, SuperFresh, The Food Emporium, Waldbaum's) | Northeast, Midwest, South | 19 |
| 15 | Military Commissary | Northeast, West, South | 19 |
| 15 | Roundy's Supermarkets, Inc. (Copp's Food Center, Harvey's Supermarket, Pick 'n Save, Rainbow Foods) | Midwest | 19 |
| 18 | Delhaize America, Inc. (Food Lion, Hannaford, Sweetbay Supermarket) | Northeast, South | 18 |
| 19 | Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc. | South | 17 |
| 20 | Bi-Lo, Inc. | South | 11 |
| 20 | Save Mart Supermarkets, Inc. | West | 11 |
| 22 | Wal-Mart Stores (Wal-Mart Supercenter) | Northeast, Midwest, South, West | 10 |
| 23 | Stater Bros. Markets | West | 9 |



It is likely that the economic status of the local community affected an individual store’s humane score. Economics alone, however, does not appear to explain the variance observed within and between corporations. For example, the Wal-Mart and Target corporations more or less serve the same type of shopper, yet Target was found to offer twice as many humane food products as Wal-Mart. The same finding applied to Whole Foods and Trader Joe’s companies, with Whole Foods scoring significantly higher than its competitor Trader Joe’s.

All 23 supermarket corporations offered at least one cage free or free-range brand of eggs and at least one organic dairy product in one or more of their stores (Table 3). Meat and poultry products were harder to find; in fact, four of the bottom five companies offered no humanely labeled meat in any of the stores surveyed by WSPA. Organic was the most common humane claim, followed by cage free/free range, humane verified, and grass fed.¹⁰ Altogether, 416 unique humane food labels were recorded by the survey.

Table 3. Survey of U.S. Humane Food Labels

| <u>Humane Claim</u> | <u>No. of Products</u> | <u>No. of Companies</u> |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|
| GOOD | | |
| Cage free/free range eggs | 69 | 23 |
| Free range unprocessed poultry | 15 | 9 |
| Free range processed poultry | 2 | 1 |
| Grass fed dairy | 1 | 1 |
| Grass fed unprocessed meat | 8 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 95 | |
| BETTER | | |
| Organic eggs | 39 | 21 |
| Organic dairy | 169 | 23 |
| Organic/free range unprocessed meat | 81 | 18 |
| Organic/free range processed meat | 52 | 15 |
| TOTAL | 345 | |
| BEST | | |
| Third party humane verified eggs | 9 | 8 |
| Third party humane verified dairy | 1 | 1 |
| Third party humane verified unprocessed meat | 10 | 7 |
| Third party humane verified processed meat | 12 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 32 | |

| <u>Humane Label</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Dairy | 170 | 40.9 |
| Eggs | 83 | 19.9 |
| Unprocessed meat/poultry | 101 | 24.3 |
| Processed meat/poultry | 62 | 14.9 |
| TOTAL* | 416 | |

* Total number of labels is less than the total number of claims, as some products make multiple claims (i.e., “cage free” and “organic”).

Consumers Hold the Power

When researchers at the University of California, Santa Cruz, asked consumers to rate their interest in eight food production-related topics, they ranked the treatment of animals third, just after food safety and food nutrition.¹¹ Moreover, a majority of respondents to a national telephone poll conducted by Oklahoma State University said they felt that “personal food choices have a large impact on the well-being of farm animals.”¹²

Food purchasing decisions by individuals can make a profound difference in the lives of animals raised for food. Farmers will produce, and retailers will sell, what shoppers want to buy. Prices for more humanely produced foods, though currently higher than for products made from factory-farmed animals, will eventually become more competitive as demand increases and industry standards for all animal-derived food products are raised.

Consumers should request humane food products when they shop or eat out. Retailers can help their customers locate these products by grouping the products together and providing clear signage. And the government needs to do its part by modifying or eliminating misleading labels, such as “natural,” that do not meet the public’s expectation for the claim. More information about humane food labels can be found at www.EatHumane.org.



Few large dairies in the U.S. provide cows with access to pasture for grazing.

Notes

- ¹ The web-based survey conducted by Harris Interactive had a sample size of 2,228 adult Americans.
- ² J Gabbett, Consumers looking for socially responsible restaurants, Meatingplace.com, April 15, 2008.
- ³ J Lusk et al., Consumer preferences for farm animal welfare: Results of a nationwide telephone survey, Oklahoma State University, Department of Agricultural Economics, August 2007.
- ⁴ In a poll of Metro readers from New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, 26% said they regularly buy free-range eggs. Metro Life Panel: The environment, Metro, April 1, 2008.
- ⁵ What do people want to know about their food? Measuring central coast consumers’ interest in food system issues, University of California, Santa Cruz, Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems, Winter 2005. Only 16% of respondents felt that they knew enough about how their food is grown, processed, transported and/or sold, and 59% said it is difficult to find out this information.
- ⁶ The 3 humane food certification programs are “American Humane Certified” (American Humane Association), “Animal Welfare Approved” (Animal Welfare Institute), and “Certified Humane” (Humane Farm Animal Care). Information about these programs is available on the sponsoring organization’s website.
- ⁷ The super 50, Progressive Grocer, May 1, 2007, pp. 36-50.
- ⁸ Three surveys were duplicates, 2 were removed due to concerns about the accuracy of the information, and 27 were eliminated because they were completed on stores not included in the study.
- ⁹ The score for Whole Foods understates the availability of humane foods for this company because it requires minimum animal welfare standards for all animal products sold, regardless of label claims.
- ¹⁰ No foods with “pastured raised” claims were recorded; farmers making these claims typically sell their products at smaller stores, farmers markets, and direct to customers.
- ¹¹ See note #5.
- ¹² See note #3.

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The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is an international animal welfare organization with its headquarters in London UK, and with 16 other offices worldwide. Holding consultative status with the United Nations and observer status with the Council of Europe, the WSPA represents the largest alliance of animal welfare organizations in the world with more than 900 member societies in over 150 countries.

The WSPA works to alleviate animal suffering using a collaborative approach encompassing hands-on work, educational initiatives, lobbying, and awareness campaigns. Areas of work include stray animal control, humane education, disaster relief, farm animal welfare, and ending the commercial exploitation of wildlife.

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