

The World Society for the Protection of Animals

Finding Animal Friendly Food

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



WSPA

Introduction



American consumers are faced with an ever-increasing array of food product labels that make claims about 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 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 75% 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 50% 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 25% 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 to help 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 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 claim standard. These

standards 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 United States, all of which are administered by animal welfare organizations.⁶

Table 1. Humane Food Claims

A GOOD Start

** These claims 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 claims 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 claims 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 pigs and poultry, so this claim is meaningless when used on pork, chicken and turkey products. The “no antibiotics used” claim suggests the animal wasn’t raised on a factory farm, but by itself is not an indicator of high animal welfare.

“Natural” – This claim 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 established a voluntary definition for this claim. It indicates that the animal was raised without the use of antibiotics and hormones and had been given only vegetarian feed. WSPA opposes this 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 stores used was based on the top 25 U.S. supermarket chains by annual sales. Both retail chains and wholesale membership clubs were included.

The 2009 survey is the second audit of U.S. grocery stores, repeating a survey initially conducted in the spring of 2008. Wholesale stores were added to the 2009 survey, and a total of 19 retail chains were audited both years.

A survey form created in 2008 to document the number and type of humanely labeled products was modified for the 2009 study. WSPA staff and volunteers conducted the surveys throughout the country; stores were surveyed in rural, suburban, and urban areas of 34 states.

A total of 200 individual stores were surveyed. On average, the study surveyed 8 stores belonging to each of the 25 supermarket chains. 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 25 supermarket companies.

How the Stores Rated

Whole Foods Market scored highest in the survey, offering nearly twice as many humanely labeled products per store as the two companies tied for second, Shaw's Supermarkets and Publix Super Markets (Table 2).⁷ Variation was found among the stores owned by the Supervalu corporation. For example, Shaw's had a score of "42" while Albertsons scored "22." On the other hand, little variation was found among the chains belonging to the Kroger, Safeway, and Ahold USA corporations.

Wal-Mart Stores, the world's largest food retailer, and the 3 wholesale clubs included in the survey, scored near the bottom of the 25 supermarket chains. However, the lowest individual chain in the survey was Save-A-Lot Food Stores, with no humanely labeled products found in any of its stores.

Of the 19 chains surveyed in both 2008 and 2009, all but 2 increased their offerings of humanely labeled foods, and the scores for some stores jumped dramatically (Table 2). Only Shaw's Supermarkets and Wal-Mart dropped, and the decline was modest in both cases. Overall, the average score of the 19 stores that were surveyed both years increased by 23%.

Table 2. U.S. Grocery Store Rankings

Rank	Chain/Corporation	2009 Score	2008 Score	% Difference
1	Whole Foods Market	83	76	+9%
2	Shaw's Supermarkets, Inc. (Supervalu, Inc.)	42	44	-5%
2	Publix Super Markets	42	36	+35%
4	Hy-Vee Inc.	36	29	+24%
5	Ralphs (Kroger Co.)	33	---*	---
6	Trader Joe's Co.	32	23	+39%
6	Kroger Co.	32	25	+28%
8	Giant Food Stores (Ahold USA, Inc.)	31	22	+41%
9	Stop & Shop (Ahold USA, Inc.)	30	24	+25%
10	Vons (Safeway, Inc.)	29	13	+123%
10	Safeway, Inc.	29	24	+21%
12	Meijer, Inc.	28	24	+17%
13	Giant Eagle, Inc.	25	22	+14%
14	SuperTarget Center (Target Corp.)	22	21	+5%
14	Albertsons (Supervalu, Inc.)	22	14	+57%
16	H.E. Butt Grocery Co.	21	16	+31%
17	Winn-Dixie Stores, Inc.	18	17	+6%
18	Pathmark (Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co.)	17	13	+31%
19	Food Lion (Delhaize America, Inc.)	16	9	+78%
20	Albertson's LLC	11	---*	---
21	Wal-Mart Supercenter (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.)	8	10	-20%
21	BJ's Wholesale Club, Inc.	8	---*	---
21	Costco Wholesale Corp.	8	---*	---
24	Sam's Club (Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.)	3	---*	---
25	Save-A-Lot Food Stores	0	---*	---

* Store not surveyed in 2008



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.⁸ All

but one supermarket chain offered at least one organic dairy product in one or more of their stores (Table 3). In addition, 21 of the 25 chains offered at least one cage free or free range egg product. Meat and poultry were harder to find, but the amount of processed meat products (hot dogs, sausage, etc.) increased significantly over 2008. Organic was the most common humane claim, followed by cage free/free range and humane verified. Altogether, 484 unique humane food labels were recorded by the survey, a 16% increase from 2008.

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

Humane Label*	No. of Labels	No. of Chains		
GOOD				
Grass fed dairy	3	2		
Cage free/free range eggs	42	21		
Free range poultry	23	8		
Grass fed meat	6	3		
TOTAL	74			
BETTER				
Organic/free range/pasture raised dairy	173	24		
Organic/pasture raised eggs	66	22		
Organic/free range/pasture raised unprocessed meat	72	12		
Organic/free range/pasture raised processed meat	60	12		
TOTAL	371			
BEST				
Third party humane verified dairy	5	4		
Third party humane verified eggs	12	9		
Third party humane verified unprocessed meat/poultry	8	8		
Third party humane verified processed meat/poultry	14	6		
TOTAL	39			
Total Humane Labels	No. 2009	% 2009	No. 2008	% 2008
Dairy	181	37.4	170	40.9
Eggs	120	24.8	83	19.9
Unprocessed meat/poultry	101	20.9	101	24.3
Processed meat/poultry	82	16.9	62	14.9
GRAND TOTAL	484		416	

* Product labels containing multiple humane claims were counted only once and under the highest scored claim (Good, Better, or Best). For example, a product label containing both the "cage free" and "USDA organic" claim was counted only once and only under the "USDA organic" claim. Product labels containing "natural" and "naturally raised" were not counted because they are not considered humane claims.

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.⁹ 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.”¹⁰

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. In addition, the government must modify or eliminate misleading claims, such as “natural,” that do not meet the public’s expectation for the claim. More information about humane food can be found at www.EatHumane.org.



Few large dairies in the United States 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 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.
- ⁸ Trader Joe’s did significantly increase its humane offerings between 2008 and 2009 moving from 9th place to tied for 6th.
- ⁹ See note #5.
- ¹⁰ 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 1000 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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