

THE REAL TRUTH ABOUT CHICKEN

FAQ

Consumers want to be sure that all animals being raised for food are treated with respect and are properly cared for during their lives. The people and companies involved in raising chickens for food share the public's concern. They recognize that they have an ethical obligation to make sure that the animals on their farms are well cared for.



Do chickens suffer from unnaturally fast and often debilitating growth?

If a chicken was too big to walk, it would not be able to access its food and water, and would ultimately die. It would not only be unethical for a farmer to do anything debilitating to his or her chickens, but from a pure business standpoint, it would make zero business and economic sense for a farmer to do anything to a bird that would harm it. The birds are their livelihoods and farmers want to do everything possible to keep them healthy.

Is it true that birds grow faster than they did in 1925?

Because of better technology, science and genetics, it takes less time and feed to get a chicken to market weight today.

Back in the early days of the commercial poultry industry – around the 1940s – each chicken required approximately 16 pounds of feed to achieve a four-pound weight. Today, that amount of feed has been reduced by more than half – less than seven pounds of feed – to grow the same size bird, all without the use of growth hormones or steroids. These tremendous advances in genetics and feed efficiency also contribute to a better environment for us all. Lower feed requirements reduce the demand for corn and soybeans, thus reducing chicken's land, air, carbon and water footprints. This efficiency also aids in lowering the fuel consumption and exhaust emissions of the tractors and trucks that harvest and bring the grain to market.

In what conditions are chickens raised?

Today's chicken farmers and processors produce birds that benefit from modern technology, advances in nutrition, protection from predators and disease, 24-hour access to clean water and feed, adequate room to grow and move freely, and professional veterinary attention.

Once the chicks grow into young meat chickens – or broilers – they are raised in large barns. But these are far from the wooden barns of old that you might imagine. They are sophisticated, secure grow-out facilities with strictly controlled temperature, humidity and ventilation systems inside – which provide vital protection from the outdoor elements, disease and predators. Most farmers receive remote alarm notifications through their phones, pagers or other devices which alerts them if the chickens are too hot or cold or need more food or water.



Chickens like to do four things: eat, drink, play around/flock together and rest. In today's barns, they have plenty of room to do all of those things.

To get chickens to grow bigger, they're pumped with hormones and steroids, right?

Chickens are fed a diet consisting of wholesome grains like corn and soybeans – along with nutritional supplements such as vitamins and minerals. Contrary to some myths, growth-enhancing additives such as hormones or steroids are never used. In fact, they are prohibited under federal law.



Are there laws or regulations preventing the abuse of chickens?

The chicken industry has come together on a specific set of expectations that will ensure that the birds they raise are taken care of with the highest standards, starting at hatch. Since healthy, top-quality animals are needed for food, proper treatment is not only an ethical obligation, but it just makes good business sense. If a farmer or other employee is found to be abusing a bird in any way, they can be fired or even arrested.

To assist the people and the companies who produce and process chickens for food, the National Chicken Council developed the NCC Animal Welfare Guidelines and Audit Checklist which have been widely adopted within the chicken industry. These guidelines cover every phase of the chicken's life and offers science-based recommendations for proper treatment.

The transportation of poultry is also regulated, and USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service has guidelines and directives setting humane slaughter requirements under the Poultry Products Inspection Act:

FSIS regulates the slaughter of poultry under its Good Commercial Practices regulation at 9 CFR 381.65. Specifically, FSIS regulations require that "Poultry must be slaughtered in accordance with good commercial practices in a manner that will result in thorough bleeding of the carcasses and ensure that breathing has stopped prior to scalding." 9 CFR 381.65(b).

FSIS published in the Federal Register a notice in 2005 (70 Fed. Reg. 56624 (Sept. 28, 2005)) reminding establishments that the Poultry Products Inspection Act requires that live poultry "be handled in a manner consistent with food commercial practices, which means they should be treated humanely." The notice encourages a system approach to ensuring poultry are systematically handled humanely, sets forth a number of factors to consider when handling and slaughtering poultry, and refers readers to the National Chicken Council Animal Welfare Guidelines and Audit Checklist.

Are chickens raised with the routine use of antibiotics?



One of the tools in the toolbox to ensure animal health and produce wholesome animal protein is the limited use of FDA-approved antibiotics, with veterinary oversight, to treat and prevent disease. They are expensive and not used routinely.

The chicken industry strongly believes that consumers deserve a choice when it comes to their meat and poultry purchases. We agree there needs to be dialogue about the use of antibiotics in farm animals, but we stand firm that antibiotics, when used properly and under veterinary oversight, are critical to keeping birds healthy and food safe. The FDA has recently introduced a guidance policy that will restrict the use in livestock and poultry of medically important antibiotics for "therapeutic" use, which FDA defines as treatment, control or prevention. The policy will also increase oversight by a licensed veterinarian.

The large majority of the antibiotics approved by the FDA for use in poultry production are not used in human medicine, and therefore have zero effect on antibiotic resistance in humans. The FDA banned fluoroquinolones in poultry production in 2005 and cephalosporins in 2011.