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sprig stat a tip or fact to take away

The Right Way to Mow:

From spring to fall, have your mower blade on the highest setting. Tall grass in the summer shades itself and conserves water. Tall grass in the fall shades the soil and keeps weed seed from germinating.

ASK THE EXPERT

Adele Douglass

Adele Douglass believes that it's not just vegetarians that care about the plight of animals on factory farms. She created the Certified Humane Raised & Handled labeling program in 2003 to help consumers choose meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products from farms that raise animals in a humane manner and allow them to engage in their natural behaviors like foraging on grass (hormones and non-therapeutic antibiotics are prohibited, as is confinement in crates or cages). Approximately 60 producers are now certified including Meyer Natural Angus Beef, Applegate Farms Bacon, Murray's Chicken, and Pete & Gerry's Organic Eggs. Last year, nearly 20 million farm animals were raised under certified humane standards.—Jen Uscher



Why did you see a need for a food label that would give consumers assurance that farm animals being made into food were raised humanely?

I created the program because I believed it was the fastest way to change the way farm animals are raised in the U.S., through consumer demand, rather than a legislative approach. The key to the standards is that animals have to be able to express their natural behaviors, to do what animals do. If you're a chicken, you flap your wings, you perch, you dust bathe. Animals can't be physically confined so they can't move. [On conventional farms], most pregnant pigs are kept in what's called a gestation crate. The entire time they're pregnant, all they can do is stand up and lay down. That's not allowed in our program. Dr. Temple Grandin is on our scientific committee. She once described how animals are currently raised in food production this way: Imagine spending your entire life sitting in an airline seat.

You're not a vegetarian, so what sparked your interest in this issue?

I worked for a humane organization and I was asked to join a committee on animal welfare that was updating a guide for the care and use of animals in agricultural

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research and teaching. This is always a contentious process and I swear they picked me because I'd never been on a farm. I'm from New York and what did I know about farm animals? But they came to regret that. I asked some wonderful women animal scientists if I could come to their universities and ask them about these issues and the alternatives. They took me to farms and I was appalled. I visited an operation where chickens were smashed into cages and frantic and couldn't move or sit down. I thought: If people knew where their food came from, they would freak out. This is a problem that has to be dealt with. And this is one of those areas where a market solution might actually work.

Are Certified Humane products more expensive and, if so, why?

We did a survey of prices in stores in the Washington, D.C. area a couple of years ago and found that Certified Humane products cost more than conventional/commodity ones, but less than certified organic ones. Ours were in the middle. The reason they cost more than conventional is that the producers are following higher standards, especially in terms of space requirements. They have fewer animals on the farm because they're not as packed in. They're usually fed a better feed. Your average commodity chicken can be fed boiled-up feathers and innards. Our chickens cannot eat any mammalian or avian protein, period. So the feed costs are higher. Also, labor costs are higher because, for example, pigs are inquisitive and social, so you have to watch them more if they're not in crates. But the program gives farmers a niche and an opportunity to raise animals the way they want to and get paid more. It's a win-win for the consumer, the animals, and the farmer. It's a myth that people only want cheap food in the U.S.

Do humanely raised meats, eggs, and other foods taste better?

Conventional chicken has no taste anymore. The first time I cooked a certified humane one, it was like "Yum, what's that smell?" It was familiar. I remembered it from my childhood. The best thing is to do your own taste test and see what you think. For example, with eggs: Buy a half dozen conventional eggs and a half dozen eggs that are certified humane. Todd Gray, the chef at Equinox restaurant in Washington, DC, did this blind taste test and prepared everything the same. Everyone chose the certified humane product as tasting better.

Is there a lot of demand for Certified Humane products now?

Yes, and what's nice to see is the farms that are being converted to follow the standards. We're seeing cages taken out. Some of our suppliers made big changes, like removing gestation stalls. Everyone on this program had to make changes to get certified. That's what's so gratifying.

How does it benefit the environment to raise animals humanely?

If you're raising animals humanely, you can't have giant numbers of them concentrated on the farm, so you're using less land and water. We're focused on animal welfare rather than the environment in our work, but we think it's a bonus that it affects these other things.

Why do you think there's a trend of non-vegetarian consumers getting interested in seeking out humanely raised food?

Prior to the invention of the automobile or the train, horses provided all methods of transportation for goods and people. The inhumane treatment of these horses is what caused the creation of humane societies in the 19th century, in the US and elsewhere. Now it's the same with animals raised for food. Meat eaters, vegetarians, and even vegans do not want to see farm animals treated inhumanely. That is why our program has experienced such rapid growth.

What are your future hopes for the Certified Humane Raised & Handled labeling program?

My fantasy is that our standards become the norm in the food industry and we just keep upgrading them and making them higher and higher.

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The advertisement features a bright yellow background. At the top is the Chevy bowtie logo and the word "CHEVY" in large, bold, white letters. Below this is a vertical stack of six icons: a gas pump nozzle, a leaf, a pig, a chicken, a cow, and a water drop. At the bottom, the text "Gas-friendly to gas-free." is written in a white, sans-serif font. Below the text is a green button with white text that says "see how »".

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