

Poultry FAQ

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What is PCC's standard for chickens and turkeys?

PCC requires that all fresh meat, including poultry, be certified organic or non-GMO verified. The standard also includes specific criteria to ensure the birds raised for poultry sold at our stores are treated humanely, have access to the outdoors, and are not given hormones or antibiotics. In 2018, PCC [signed on to the Better Chicken Commitment](#), a campaign from the organization Compassion in World Farming, which aims to improve the welfare of broiler hens, or chickens raised for meat. Under that commitment, our suppliers increase indoor space for birds, provide more enriching or stimulating habitats, integrate slower growing breeds, and employ more humane slaughter methods. You can read our full poultry standard [here](#).

Which certifications help ensure better animal welfare?

PCC supports third-party certifications that have rigorous and transparent standards, routine auditing, and accountability for suppliers who fail to meet their requirements. PCC is a strong advocate for USDA organic certification, because it is the only seal that is backed by a federal law and sets strong production standards. However, while organic provides [some assurances concerning animal welfare](#), such as requiring outdoor access for birds, it does have some gaps, both within the standard and through enforcement. Coupling organic certification with additional animal welfare certifications, such as [Animal Welfare Approved](#) from A Greener World or [Certified Humane](#), provides the best assurance of animal and environmental protections.

PCC also supports regenerative farming certifications that require organic as a baseline and then set stricter requirements around treatment of animals, such as [Regenerative Organic Certification](#) from the Rodale Institute and the [Real Organic Project](#) certification. The certifications noted here are just a few examples of the many that have been developed and there are resources available online to help consumers sort through all the labels and claims that can be found on meat and animal products. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) has developed a [meat, eggs, and dairy label guide](#) that provides information on common claims and ASPCA-recommended certifications and the Animal Welfare Institute has a [consumer guide that ranks labels and welfare claims](#) from best to worst. Additionally, Consumer Reports has a [Food Label Guide](#) that rates various labels and claims to help consumers identify which ones have little meaning behind them versus those with true guarantees.

Does the USDA organic certification guarantee better animal welfare?

While the organic label does [provide some improvements](#) around the treatment of animals compared to industrial, conventional production, it is not as protective of animal welfare as most consumers would like it to be. It requires outdoor access for animals and prohibits using certain substances like antibiotics and growth hormones that are associated with lower animal welfare. Some of the regulations, however, have been interpreted differently, such as the stipulation for "outdoor access," resulting in some large producers doing the bare minimum to obtain organic certification. PCC and many others in the organic community have been pushing for better livestock and poultry protections and [advocating for the USDA](#) to implement a set of rules that would strengthen the animal welfare requirements under the organic label.

Why does PCC require organic certification or non-GMO verification for fresh poultry products?

PCC prioritizes organic certification for our fresh poultry meat because organic production standards are better for the birds, consumers, and planet. For example, [organic poultry production](#) rules require birds to be organically raised starting on the second day of life, which means they are given outdoor access, certified organic feed and bedding material, and are not given growth hormones or other prohibited feed additives. Manure must also be managed so it doesn't contribute to contamination of crops, soil, or water. Additionally, organic prohibits the use of hormones and antibiotics, which studies have shown can remain in the meat after slaughter, posing a health risk to consumers.^{i,ii} Organic certification also prohibits the use of GMO feed.

If a producer is not certified organic, PCC requires them to obtain non-GMO verification, which means the birds are not given GMO feed. Producers must also, of course, still meet PCC's standards for no antibiotics or hormones, access to outdoors, and more. We know that avoiding GMOs is a top priority for PCC shoppers, so requiring the certification provides an additional layer of protection to ensure our producers are meeting that requirement. While non-GMO feed doesn't significantly impact animal welfare or determine a producer's other practices, PCC believes it is important because a large percentage of [GMO cropland is produced to feed animals](#). Requiring non-GMO certification for the non-organic fresh poultry sold at PCC is another way we can avoid participating in the GMO supply chain.

Why aren't there stocking density requirements for poultry under the USDA organic regulations?

While organic certification does offer some important protections for animal welfare and quality of life compared to conventional production, a major criticism of the existing organic rule pertaining to poultry is its lack of clearly defined standards concerning stocking densities, what constitutes meaningful outdoor access, slaughter, and transport. Organic advocacy groups, organic retailers (including PCC), the National Organic Standards Board, and many organic producers have worked for years to develop stronger animal welfare regulations for organic. These efforts culminated in the drafting and finalization of the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices (OLPP) rule, that was published in the Federal Register on January 19, 2017. However, on May 13, 2018, the USDA [reversed course and withdrew the finalized rule](#). Lawsuits from numerous organic advocacy groups ensued. Recent statements from the USDA indicate a willingness to reconsider the withdrawal of the rule.

Why is organic and pastured-raised poultry more expensive than conventional?

Poultry meat from birds raised in more sustainable and ethical environments, like those sold at PCC, reflects the costs of production. Conventional industrial livestock operations can produce less expensive cuts of meat by prioritizing quantity over quality of life and externalizing their costs—the cost of the product at the store might be lower, but the [long term costs](#) are significantly greater in terms of human health, animal welfare, public health (such as from waste fields that pollute the air and water and overuse of antibiotics that contributes to the development of antibiotic resistance), and greenhouse gas emissions. There are also higher costs associated with third-party certifications, like USDA organic, which are reflected in the cost at the shelf.

How do you ensure products sold meet your animal welfare standards?

PCC has a number of ways in which we ensure our suppliers meet our standards. First, we seek out potential vendors that align with our mission, vision, and values, including other cooperatives and producers that often establish and audit against their own set of strong animal welfare standards. Next, we request that they provide us information about their

production practices by filling out a vendor checklist, which asks about outdoor access, stocking density, feed, antibiotic use, and more. For local vendors, in Washington state or Oregon, we try to arrange visits to tour farms and ranches whenever possible and permissible under public health circumstances. Lastly, we prioritize strong third-party certifications, such as organic, to ensure product claims and integrity.

Is PCC's chicken washed in chlorine?

PCC's suppliers do not use chlorine washes on their chicken. Pitman Farms, the supplier of our PCC private label chicken, uses an organic vinegar solution. However, chlorine washing is a common practice in the U.S., and allowed by both USDA certified organic poultry regulations and regulations governing conventional poultry. The intention of the washes, which are used after slaughter and before packaging, is to remove contaminants that can cause food-borne illness such as salmonella and listeria. Some recent studies do question their effectiveness, among other concerns, but for now they remain the standard. One reason our suppliers don't use this practice is because their chickens are air chilled after slaughter, rather than submerged in cold water that would contain the chlorinated substances.

What are "low-stress handling practices" that PCC requires in its standard for handling chickens?

In many industrialized operations, the process of corralling and moving birds when they are taken to slaughter can be extremely stressful to birds. PCC requires vendors to make the process less traumatic. While the specifics may differ between producers, some common methods for reducing stress to birds include selecting at night (when broods are calmer), gentle handling and selection, and allowing them to settle in holding crates before transport. Avoided practices include dumping or rolling birds from containers or selecting and catching g birds by one leg.

I've read chickens raised for meat grow too fast and big to even move. What is PCC doing to address this issue?

Broiler chickens, those raised for meat, have been bred for increasing efficiency over the past few decades. The faster a bird grows and the more meat that can be obtained from a single bird, the more profit. The unfortunate result for the birds is often poor health, suffering from mobility issues, cardiac issues, broken bones, and more. It has also resulted in lower quality meat. Factory farmed chickens are more likely to produce breast meat that is either tough and pale or has strips of fatty deposits—these two conditions are known as woody breast and white striping, respectively. One step PCC has taken to address this issue is to sign on to the [Better Chicken Commitment](#), a [campaign](#) from Compassion in World Farming. Identifying and adopting slower-growing breeds is a key element of the campaign. Pitman Farms, which supplies PCC's Private Label chicken, has sign on to the Better Chicken Commitment as well, with the goal of raising slower-growing breeds by 2026.

ⁱ Belachew B. Hirpessa, Beyza H. Ulusoy, and Canan Hecer, "Hormones and Hormonal Anabolics: Residues in Animal Source Food, Potential Public Health Impacts, and Methods of Analysis," *Journal of Food Quality* 2020 (August 28, 2020): e5065386, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2020/5065386>.

ⁱⁱ Yujie Ben et al., "Human Health Risk Assessment of Antibiotic Resistance Associated with Antibiotic Residues in the Environment: A Review," *Environmental Research* 169 (February 1, 2019): 483–93, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2018.11.040>.