

Beef Cattle & Bison FAQ



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Does PCC have a standard for beef and bison?

PCC requires that all fresh beef and bison meat be certified organic or non-GMO verified. The standard also includes specific criteria to ensure the cattle and bison raised for meat sold at our stores are treated humanely, have access to the outdoors, and are not given hormones or antibiotics. You can read our full beef cattle and bison 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 at least 120 days of free access to certified organic pasture per year for ruminants, 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 above are just a few examples of the many that have been developed related to animal treatment 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, at least 120 days of pasture grazing for ruminants, 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 protections and [advocating for the USDA](#) to implement a set of rules that would strength the animal welfare requirements under the organic label.

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

PCC prioritizes organic certification for our fresh meat because organic production standards are better for the animal, consumer, and the planet. For example, ruminant livestock are required to be on pasture for at least 120 days of the grazing season. 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 animals are not given GMO feed. Producers must also, of course, still meet PCC’s standards for no antibiotics or hormones, guaranteed 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 meat sold at PCC is another way we can avoid participating in the GMO supply chain.

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

Meat from animals raised in more sustainable and ethical environments, like those sold at PCC, more accurately 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 (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 your grass-fed beef fully grass-fed or grain finished?

PCC does not have a fully grass-fed beef requirement, but any grains that are fed to cattle must be either organic or non-GMO verified, preferably Non-GMO Project Verified. PCC offers both grain-fished and fully grass-fed beef in order to provide options to customers. The claim of grass-fed can be difficult because unless a producer is certified as American Grassfed, animals can be raised on feedlots and given pelleted grass as part of their feed and still meet the claim of being grass-fed. To learn more, read our *Sound Consumer* article "[Label Lowdown: Grass-Fed Beef.](#)"

Who supplies PCC's beef?

Currently, PCC has two fresh beef producers. For our certified organic, grass-fed beef, [Thousand Hills](#) is our producer. Much like a co-operative, Thousand Hills sources from a number of farms within primarily Minnesota that meet their and PCC's standards. Thousand Hills recently received a high rating in The Cornucopia Institute's [Organic Beef Scorecard](#). For non-organic fresh beef sold at PCC, our producer is [Country Natural/Oregon Country Beef](#). While not certified organic, family ranches within this cooperative raise their cattle on pasture, provide Non-GMO Project Verified feed to cattle, and are animal welfare certified to level 4 by the Global Animal Partnership (G.A.P).

Does PCC sell veal?

No. PCC does not sell veal because of the industry's confinement and feeding practices that we believe go against our mission of humane treatment for animals. As customers are demanding more transparency on how their food is produced and ethical treatment of animals, there have been some advancements in the treatment of veal calves—the United Kingdom banned veal crates in 2007 and several states in the US have done likewise, including Arizona, California, Colorado, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Ohio, and Rhode Island.ⁱⁱⁱ Better systems allow calves to have more mobility, outdoor access, and a more normal diet that does not restrict iron intake or solid foods. However, because the supply of humanely raised veal is still limited, PCC maintains its prohibition against the sale of veal in our stores.

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>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Higher Welfare for Veal Calves," *Compassion in World Farming*, accessed August 31, 2021, <https://www.ciwf.com/farmed-animals/cows/veal-calves/higher-welfare/>.