

Beef Cattle & Bison

Version 2.0: 2025



Reason for Standard

Meat provides an important nutrition source for many people and cultures, but as industrial livestock production has grown over the past several decades, so have the animal welfare, climate, and human health impacts of raising animals for food.^{i,ii,iii}

Most animal welfare concerns pertain to large-scale, industrial livestock operations. Within these operations, large quantities of animals are housed and fed in crowded conditions usually without access to pasture or the outdoors. Animals in these operations frequently face abuse and psychological stress brought on by overcrowding and confinement.^{iv,v,vi} Industrial livestock operations often use synthetic growth hormones and antibiotics to speed growth rates and combat illness brought on by confinement and overcrowding. Some research suggests that residues of growth hormones or steroids can remain in the meat after slaughter, thus exposing consumers to synthetic hormones or steroids.^{vii} Livestock raised in confined and crowded facilities increase the spread of zoonotic diseases, as pathogens are more likely to spread between animals and humans under those conditions, and perpetuate antibiotic resistance; 80% of all antibiotics sold in the United States are used in animal agriculture.^{viii,ix,x}

Beyond animal welfare and human health concerns, industrial livestock production poses significant environmental threats. It is responsible for approximately 12-18% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, as a source of not only CO₂, but also methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O).^{xi,xii} Most emissions come from a combination of animal waste, conversion of ecosystems (grasslands and forests) to intensive livestock operations, and enteric fermentation.^{xiii} Water and air pollution from large-scale, industrial operations can be significant.^{xiv} Compounding this issue, disparate impacts of this pollution are often experienced by underserved and marginalized communities.^{xv,xvi}

While there are many concerns associated with the industrialized approach to raising animals, there are alternative production methods that can greatly reduce or eliminate many associated harms and negative impacts. For example, livestock that is certified organic must meet specific United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations that are backed by a federal law known as the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). Under this certification program, meat, pork, poultry, and dairy producers must meet organic production requirements that often result in improved animal welfare, enhanced biodiversity, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and healthier soils that sequester more carbon.^{xvii} Organic certification also prohibits added growth hormones, antibiotics, animal byproducts in feed, and genetically engineered feed ingredients. Under organic regulations, ruminants must have free access to pasture during the grazing season, or at minimum 120 days per year.^{xviii,xix}

Often building on the foundational standards of organic but many times lacking verification or a consistent definition, regenerative agriculture also takes a more holistic approach to livestock production, crop cultivation, and land management.^{xx} For most regenerative practitioners, animal health and wellbeing are key components of this holistic approach. Outdoor access is foundational for raising livestock and farmers are encouraged to incorporate animals into native ecosystems through managed or rotational grazing of ruminants (e.g., cows) on grasslands or incorporating animals (of any species) into forests or tree crops, a practice known as agroforestry or silvopasture.^{xxi,xxii,xxiii}

Whether organic or verified regenerative, these practices offer alternative frameworks to conventional agriculture, with less impact on the climate and better animal welfare outcomes.^{xxiv,xxv,xxvi}

As a retailer that prioritizes the welfare of people, animals, and the planet, PCC sets high standards for the meat products sold in our stores, so that we can provide the most humane and sustainable choices for omnivorous shoppers.

Scope

This is a product-specific standard that applies to all fresh beef and bison meat, including any chef-inspired raw offerings and fresh PCC Private Label sausages.

Standard

1. Products

- 1.1. All meat products sold at PCC under the scope of this standard must come from animals raised in accordance with the animal welfare requirements set forth in section 2.
 - 1.1.1. PCC encourages producers not within the scope of this standard to source meat raised from animals in compliance with the criteria outlined below in section 2.
- 1.2. Vendors within the scope of this standard must adhere to the GE Ingredients and Labeling Standard, specifically the section titled “Animal Products.”
- 1.3. PCC does not accept any meat products from cloned animals or their offspring.
- 1.4. Meats should not contain any artificial colors or flavors, protein binders, preservatives, or chemicals that increase weight, water retention, or mask potential food safety indicators such as color or odor changes.
- 1.5. PCC encourages vendors to pursue third-party certification programs to verify and add credibility to sustainability and animal welfare claims (e.g., organic, non-GMO, and Animal Welfare Approved).
- 1.6. PCC does not sell any veal products.
- 1.7. PCC encourages vendors to be honest and transparent regarding the origin of their stock and whether they maintain a closed herd.

2. Animal Welfare

2.1. Habitat & Housing

- 2.1.1. Animals must not be continuously confined to individual crates or stalls that severely limit their movement unless health circumstances require temporary limitation of full mobility.
- 2.1.2. Animal density, both indoors and out, must allow for expression of natural behaviors, both physical and social.
- 2.1.3. Animals must have access to outdoors and pasture, or land with vegetation for grazing.
- 2.1.4. Shelters and housing must be well ventilated and allow fresh air to enter.
- 2.1.5. Manure should be removed from housing or shelters on a regular basis.
- 2.1.6. Animals must have access to adequate shelter to protect them from weather or climate extremes, depending on species welfare needs.
- 2.1.7. Predator protection measures should be in place, utilizing non-lethal predator control methods first.

2.2. Nutrition

- 2.2.1. Feed must not contain animal byproducts.
- 2.2.2. Feed must be distributed in a method that minimizes competition among animals.

2.2.3. Animals must have unrestricted access to clean, fresh water at all times.

2.3. Health & Handling

2.3.1. No sub-therapeutic or non-therapeutic antibiotics, hormones, or growth promoters¹ may be used in any form to control or prevent disease, or to promote growth or feed efficiency.

2.3.2. Animals must receive preventative health care for disease and/or parasites.

2.3.3. Ill animals must be provided immediate and necessary care.

2.3.4. Low-stress handling practices must be used before, during, and after transport to slaughter facilities.

2.3.5. Electric prods must not be used in routine handling and used only as a last resort in emergency situations where the safety of animals or workers is at risk.

2.3.6. Any physical alterations to animals must be done by a veterinarian or trained professional and employ pain management during and after procedures to minimize stress and pain to animals.

2.3.6.1. PCC prohibits tail docking, ear splitting, or other methods of identification that involve cutting or tearing flesh.

2.3.6.2. Castration and dehorning, if necessary, are permitted for cattle following best practices for minimal pain and stress.

2.3.6.3. PCC recommends employing livestock management practices that eliminate or reduce the need for any physical alterations done to curtail injuries among animals, such as maintaining adequate stocking densities to minimize stress and aggression in animals.

2.4. Offspring & Weaning

2.4.1. Separation or weaning of young from the cow must be done in such a way that causes as little stress as possible.

2.4.2. Calves must not be continuously confined to individual crates or stalls that severely limit their movement unless health circumstances require temporary limitation of full mobility.

2.4.3. Young animals should have access to outdoors and be permitted to graze in season.

2.4.4. Calves must not be fed milk replacer containing antibiotics, growth promoters, or animal byproducts.

2.5. Transportation

2.5.1. Transportation times (including loading times) should not exceed 10 hours.

2.6. Mortality

2.6.1. Animals must be rendered unconscious before slaughter in commercial facilities, except where smallholder farms utilize on-farm, humane slaughter practices.

2.6.2. Slaughter facilities must be regularly audited by a third party.

2.6.3. Cattle should be six months or older at time of slaughter.

Standard-Specific Glossary

Agroforestry is the intentional integration of trees or shrubs with crop and animal production systems to create environmental, economic, and social benefits.

Animal byproducts include cooking oil from restaurants and food processors, blood and blood products, pork and horse protein, feather meal, manure, and hatchery waste.

¹ Includes ionophores.

Bison are oxlike grazing mammals in the same family as beef cattle, Bovidae. The American Bison, sometimes referred to as a buffalo or plains buffalo, is native to North America and well-adapted to the region's climates. Herds once occupied rangeland from Alaska to northern Mexico.

Calves are baby cattle or bison; the term usually describes an animal under one year of age.

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) can be defined and understood in multiple ways. The regulatory definition from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) simply identifies CAFOs as large-scale meat, dairy, and egg facilities (Animal Feeding Operations (AFO)) that raise animals in confinement for at least 45 days per year. However, any AFO that discharges manure or wastewater into a natural or human-made ditch or waterway can be classified as a CAFO, regardless of its size. These facilities are regulated under the Clean Water Act.^{xxvii} Regulatory definitions aside, CAFOs are commonly understood as factory farms that house large numbers of animals in inhumane conditions, relying heavily on antibiotics and growth hormones, and are major sources of air and water pollution. They contribute most significantly to climate change compared to other animal production systems, such as pasture raised animals or regenerative farms that incorporate livestock into land management.^{xxviii}

Cows are female bovines that have given birth (as opposed to heifers, which are females that haven't produced offspring). The term cow can be used for domesticated cattle or bison.

Enteric fermentation is the digestive process in ruminant animals, including cattle, sheep, goats, and bison, which produces methane. The gas is a byproduct of microorganisms breaking down plant material during digestion.

Fresh meats: Raw, unprocessed meat or poultry products sold without preservatives, including celery powder, in the refrigerated and frozen meat section of PCC.

Genetically Engineered (GE)/Genetically Modified Organism (GMO): A living organism whose genetic material (DNA) has been artificially manipulated in a laboratory through genetic engineering. This process creates unique combinations of genes that do not occur in nature or through traditional breeding methods, involving plant, animal, bacterial, or viral genes. Variability in the definition has created challenges in achieving transparency and consensus around GMO labeling.

Greenhouse gases (GHG) are those that trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to climate change. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is one of the most well-known GHGs, as its emissions are the largest in quantity and it remains in the atmosphere for a long time. Other GHGs include methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and fluorinated gases (most commonly associated with refrigerants).

National Organic Program (NOP) was established in 2000 under the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 to regulate the production, processing, and sale of certified organic foods in the United States. The NOP resides within the USDA and manages organic certification standards, enforcement, and accreditation of independent certifying bodies. The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB), a federal advisory committee, provides recommendations and guidance to the NOP on developing new rules and regulations related to organic certification.

Organic refers to the practices associated with organic food production and processing that prohibit the use of most synthetic inputs and pesticides, along with requiring other environmental and animal-friendly agricultural and food handling practices. Established by the Organic Foods Production Act (a federal law), the [National Organic Program](#) (NOP) within the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) manages the organic certification standards, enforcement, and accreditation of independent certifying bodies. Many other countries also have organic certification programs.

"Pasture raised" does not have a standardized definition but most definitions require that animals spend significant portions of their lives on vegetated, open pasture where they can graze freely. Most of the animals' diet comes from pastureland but are often given supplemental feed to ensure all of their nutritional needs are met. Some producers limit the definition to "seasonal pasture raised," depending on climate conditions and the needs of the animals.

Regenerative agriculture is a holistic land management and farming methodology that focuses on increasing and enhancing soil organic matter to improve nutrient content, water retention, and carbon sequestration. Unless certified by a third party with established regenerative standards, regenerative does not have an agreed upon definition or guarantee associated with the term's use.

Silvopasture is a type of agroforestry that combines trees with foraging land for livestock production.

Smallholder Farms are defined as independently owned farms whose principal operator(s) owns the farm business and demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainable farm practices and animal welfare. The principal operator is the person who is responsible for the on-site, day-to-day decisions of the farm or ranch business. Any slaughter of animals on smallholder farms must take place on farm property with attention to humane slaughter practices where reasonable given farm size and scale. Gross annual sales of a smallholder farm must fall under \$250,000.

Sub-therapeutic/non-therapeutic refers to a dose or concentration of a drug that is lower than usually prescribed to treat a disease effectively. For example, it can be common practice to add subtherapeutic doses of antibiotics to livestock feed to improve productivity.

Zoonotic diseases are infectious diseases that can be passed between animals and humans through direct contact or contact with contaminated vectors such as food or water. Common zoonotic diseases include the plague, salmonella, West Nile virus, rabies, and zoonotic influenza. Confinement of animals, or even people, increases the risk of spreading infectious diseases and there is growing concern that CAFOs are hotbeds for the spread of zoonotic diseases because of the close quarters, weakened immune systems of animals, excessive use of antibiotics, and improper waste management.^{xxix}

ⁱ EPA, "Sources of Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Agriculture Sector Emissions," Overviews and Factsheets, United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2019, <https://www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions>.

ⁱⁱ Neus González et al., "Meat Consumption: Which Are the Current Global Risks? A Review of Recent (2010–2020) Evidences," *Food Research International* (Ottawa, Ont.) 137 (November 2020): 109341, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2020.109341>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Courtney Lindwall, "Industrial Agricultural Pollution 101," *NRDC* (blog), July 31, 2019, <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/industrial-agricultural-pollution-101>.

^{iv} "The Welfare of Intensively Confined Animals in Battery Cages, Gestation Crates, and Veal Crates" (The Humane Society of the United States, July 2012), <https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/hsus-report-animal-welfare-of-intensively-confined-animals.pdf>.

^v "Animal Welfare," *A Greener World* (blog), accessed July 12, 2021, <https://agreenerworld.org/challenges-and-opportunities/animal-welfare/>.

^{vi} The Humane Society of the United States, "An HSUS Report: Welfare Issues with the Use of Hormones and Antibiotics in Animal Agriculture," January 2016, <https://www.humanesociety.org/sites/default/files/docs/hsus-report-issues-with-hormones-welfare.pdf>.

^{vii} Senthil Venkatraman et al., "Adverse Effects on Consumer's Health Caused by Hormones Administered in Cattle," *International Food Research Journal* 25 (February 1, 2018): 1–10. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/b2eb062a6ce426c9fb8e6e53a84e316a/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=816390>.

^{viii} Bryony A. Jones et al., "Zoonosis Emergence Linked to Agricultural Intensification and Environmental Change," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 110, no. 21 (May 21, 2013): 8399–8404, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1208059110>.

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