

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## ABOUT OUR PRODUCER PROTOCOLS

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### WHAT DOES PASTURE-RAISED MEAN?

Pasture-raised is not a legal term, but one we have chosen to represent a set of production practices that we consider important for the environment, animal welfare and the viability of small-scale livestock producers.

#### FOR BEEF, IT MEANS...

Cattle are raised outdoors on pasture their entire lives. Pasture is their main food source as well as their natural habitat. This low stress environment combined with a diet high in fiber produces healthy animals. Cattle are also fed, particularly during times of drought and poor pasture quality, approved supplements to ensure a nutritionally balanced diet. Having a balanced diet is important to achieve a high quality product and economic viability for the farmer.

#### FOR LAMB, IT MEANS...

Sheep are raised outdoors on pasture their entire lives and grass and forages are their principal diet. Our sheep are often raised in tandem with beef and follow them in a complementary grazing pattern that promotes forage diversity and soil quality. To ensure year-round production, it is important for ewes to have adequate nutrition, which is accomplished by providing a high-fiber supplement.

#### FOR PORK, IT MEANS...

Hogs are raised outdoors on the ground, on pasture, and/or in wooded areas, with shelter provided for protection from inclement weather. As highly intelligent omnivores, living outdoors allows them to move and express their natural biological instincts such as rooting, nesting and wallowing. Pasture and woods, while not hogs' primary food source, is their principal habitat.

### WHY DO YOU PROHIBIT GROWTH-PROMOTING ANTIBIOTICS, ADDED HORMONES AND ANIMAL BY-PRODUCTS?

#### ANTIBIOTICS

There is considerable concern about overuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture and the development of pathogens resistant to antibiotics used in human medicine. The major concern is the use of antibiotics in feed rations at sub-therapeutic doses for the purpose of promoting growth and preventing disease outbreaks. The farmers in our network never feed their animals prophylactic or sub-therapeutic antibiotics. They keep their animals healthy by raising them outdoors in their natural environment and using a preventative health program that includes adequate vitamin and mineral supplementation and vaccinations.

While rare, there are occasions when an animal will get sick, and must be treated with an antibiotic to save its life. We believe there is a big difference between a one-time treatment

of an antibiotic to help an animal heal and the broadcast use of antibiotics. If an animal gets sick, our farmers treat it and follow all required withdrawal periods. This is the most humane thing to do for the animal and it is the most respectful of our farmers, who have invested considerable time and resources in the animals' care.

## ADDED HORMONES

Hormones are chemicals that are produced naturally in the bodies of all animals, including cattle and hogs. Certain hormones make young animals gain weight faster. Most steers (male cattle) in the U.S. are implanted with synthetic growth-promoting hormones. (Hogs are not allowed to be given added hormones). Because of concerns about the health and environmental impacts associated with this practice we choose to prohibit their use.

## ANIMAL BY-PRODUCTS

Animal by-products are prohibited because of the potential link between their use in animal feed and the development of BSE or mad cow disease in cattle. Cows are herbivores, which means they are designed to eat only plants. While hogs are omnivores, they thrive on plant-based diets. Because of problems associated with BSE in Europe, many consumers are concerned about the use of animal by-products in livestock feed. There is no need for animal by-products and 100% vegetarian feed is readily available.

## ARE YOUR ANIMALS SLAUGHTERED HUMANELY?

Yes. Our hogs are slaughtered at Acre Station Meat Farm in Beaufort County, and our beef is harvested at Chaudhry's Halal Meats in Chatham County and Piedmont Custom Meats in Gibsenville. Each are small-scale, family-run, USDA-inspected facilities that provide a low-stress environment for animals during their final hours. They work with care and respect throughout the harvest process. All three facilities are routinely audited by third-party animal welfare certification organizations and are Animal Welfare Approved.

## IS YOUR MEAT ORGANIC?

No. There are two primary reasons we do not currently sell organically-raised beef, lamb and pork. First, for an animal to be raised organically it has to be fed organically-certified feed or forages. There are very limited sources for affordable, organically-certified feed and forages here in North Carolina. We hope that this changes in the future and support efforts to promote organic feed and forage production in our state. Second, in order to sell certified organic meat, it must be processed in a certified organic processing facility. These are also in limited supply in North Carolina.

## WHAT ARE APPROVED PASTURE-RAISED SUPPLEMENTS FOR BEEF?

Cattle are ruminant animals, which means their digestive system is designed for breaking down grasses and highly fibrous materials. When their diet is unbalanced or when they are fed too much starch, they can develop acidosis in their rumen, which can make them sick.

Firsthand Foods' pasture-raised beef producers focus on grazing and forage utilization and, when necessary, feed approved supplements in moderation. The key to animal health is a well balanced diet that includes the right mix of protein, energy (carbohydrates and fat), and fiber. Supplements can be incorporated into a cattle's diet without harm, as long as it is in moderation (e.g., less than 40% of their diet from adolescence to maturity). A variety of ingredients make good supplements. Firsthand Foods is currently pilot-testing a proprietary blend of the following locally-available high-fiber ingredients:

- **soybean hulls:** the fibrous skin of soybeans leftover from processing oil
- **peanut hulls:** the fibrous skin of peanuts leftover from processing oil
- **corn gluten feed:** the fibrous part of the corn plant leftover when the starch is removed.
- **wheat middlings:** the portion of the wheat kernel that is not flour and is richest in proteins, vitamins, lipids and minerals.

## WHAT ABOUT GMOS?

We are concerned about the prevalence of genetically-modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture. Most of the corn and soybeans produced in the U.S. have in some way been genetically-modified. It is extremely challenging for farmers to source non-GMO feed. That said, our hog farmers have been working diligently to develop a system for producing and processing their own non-GMO feeds. As of January 2018, our pork is 100% raised without genetically-modified ingredients. As part of the North Carolina Natural Hog Growers Association, they now raise their own non-GMO corn and soybeans and invested in the equipment necessary to separate soybean oil from meal. The oil is sold off the farm and the meal is incorporated into the feed ration. Their practices are inspected, certified and verified by A Greener World ([www.agreenerworld.org](http://www.agreenerworld.org)).

## HOW DO I KNOW WHICH FARM MY MEAT CAME FROM?

We trace every piece of meat back to the farm of origin. We work with each farmer and processor to ensure there is a unique identifier (e.g., tag number) for each animal (in the case of beef and lamb) or each farmer's batch (in the case of hogs). These numbers follow the animals through the slaughter and butchering process. And then each package is labeled with the unique identifier linking it to the animal and/or farmer.