

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT OUR PRODUCER PROTOCOLS



Our producers play a vital role in our ability to maintain strict standards for high-quality meat. For us, we believe quality starts on the farm, and these are the guidelines that we require our farmers to follow.

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 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, are their principal habitat.

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, ewes need to have adequate nutrition, which is accomplished by providing a high-fiber supplement.

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

Because our priorities include maintaining the health of the animals, the health of our consumers, and the livelihood of our farmers, we choose to prohibit the use of each of these.

ANTIBIOTICS

There is considerable concern about the 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 subtherapeutic doses to promote growth and prevent disease outbreaks. The farmers in our network never feed their animals prophylactic or subtherapeutic 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 supplementations and vaccinations.

While rare, there are occasions when an animal will get sick and must be treated with an antibiotic to save its life. 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, and hog production has recently been approved to also use growth-promoting hormones. Because of the concerns about the health and environmental impacts associated with this practice, we choose to prohibit their use entirely.

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 the 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 when 100% vegetarian feed is readily available.

ARE YOUR ANIMALS SLAUGHTERED HUMANELY?

Yes. Our hogs are slaughtered at Acre Station Meat Farm in Pinetown, NC, and Custom Quality Packers in Sims, NC. Our beef and lamb are harvested at Chaudhry's Halal Meats in Siler City, NC, and at Piedmont Custom Meats in Gibsonville, NC. Each of these are small-scale, family-run, USDA-inspected facilities that provide a low-stress environment for animals during their final hours. They use care and respect throughout the harvest process. All 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 why we do not currently sell organically-raised beef, lamb, or pork. First, for an animal to be raised organically, it has to be fed organically certified feed or forages. There are minimal sources for affordable, organically certified feed and forages here in North Carolina. We hope this changes in the future and support efforts to promote organic feed and forage production in our state. Second, 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, including the following locally-available high-fiber ingredients:

- **soybean hulls:** the fibrous skin of the 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 primary supplier for pork, the North Carolina National Hog Growers Association (NANHGA), has been working diligently to develop a system for producing and processing their own non-GMO feeds. As of January 2018, the pork we source from NANHGA is 100% produced without genetically modified ingredients. Their practices are currently inspected, certified, and verified by A Greener World. Check out their website [here](#). The only hogs that are not raised with non-GMO grains are those we source as BBQ hogs for restaurants.

HOW DO I KNOW WHICH FARM MY MEAT CAME FROM?

We trace every piece of meat back to the farm or origin. We work with each farmer and processor to ensure there is a unique identifier for each animal. Beef and lamb will have tag numbers, and hogs will have batch numbers. These numbers follow the animals through the slaughter and harvesting process. Then, they are each packaged and labeled with a unique identifier linking to the animal and/or farmer.