

# 7 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW about the “Better Chicken Commitment”

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**1** The “Better Chicken Commitment” is an activist-led initiative that ultimately wants the world to stop eating meat.

The initiative seeks to convince suppliers, restaurants, retailers and foodservice brands to adopt production practices outlined in its “Better Chicken Commitment” broiler welfare policy.

The initiative touts itself as “the leading set of standards for broiler welfare driving the food industry toward higher welfare practices.” However, it is led by a coalition of radical activist groups with a mission to end animal agriculture and impose vegan diets on consumers. In the United States, coalition membership includes:

- [American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals \(ASPCA\)](#)
- [Animal Equality](#)
- [Compassion in World Farming \(CIWF\)](#)
- [Humane Society of the United States \(HSUS\)](#)
- [Mercy for Animals](#)
- [PETA](#)
- [The Humane League](#)

These activist groups are using pressure campaign tactics to coerce suppliers, restaurants, retailers and foodservice brands into making the “Better Chicken Commitment.”

These are not your customers pressuring you – in fact, these individuals do not even eat chicken. They are relentless in their campaigns and appear to make a lot of noise – but only within their own activist circles. Pressure campaign tactics include undercover videos, protests and action alerts (petitions, social media bombarding, letters, harassing phone calls, etc.).

**2** There are two versions of the “Better Chicken Commitment” – both versions adhere to [Global Animal Partnership \(GAP\)](#) standards.

GAP was created in 2008 by Whole Foods CEO and co-founder John Mackey to establish standards and labeling for meat sold in his stores and beyond. The evolution of the Whole Foods standards into GAP began after dialogue with PETA, Animal Rights International and the Animal Welfare Institute – which decided “existing standards for animal welfare treatment were not rigorous enough.” GAP’s first executive director was Miyun Park, former vice president of farm animal welfare at HSUS and the cofounder of Compassion Over Killing.

GAP’s standards are activist-influenced with representatives from Humane Society International, CIWF and ASPCA serving on its board of directors. The standards continue to change – so they will evolve beyond what companies thought they were committing to.

## TWO VERSIONS OF THE “BETTER CHICKEN COMMITMENT”

### VERSION 1

“By 2024, we will source only chicken certified by Global Animal Partnership (GAP) and require all chickens to be processed in a manner that avoids live-dumping and live-shackling, and instead utilizes a pre-shackle, multi-step controlled-atmosphere processing system that’s widely hailed as more humane.”

### VERSION 2

“By 2024, we will require our chicken suppliers to meet the following requirements for 100% of our products:

1. Maximum stocking density of 6.0 lbs./sq. foot and prohibit broiler cages.
2. Provide birds enriched environments including litter, lighting, and enrichment
3. Process chickens in a manner that avoids pre-stun handling and instead utilizes a multi-step controlled-atmosphere processing system that induces an irreversible stun.
4. Demonstrate compliance with all standards via third-party auditing
5. Adopt breeds that demonstrate higher welfare outcomes, either: Hubbard Black, JA757, 787, 957, or 987; Rambler Ranger, Ranger Classic, or Ranger Gold; or others that meet the criteria of the RSPCA Broiler Breed Welfare Assessment Protocol or Global Animal Partnership (GAP)”

A full list of companies that have agreed to some version of the “Better Chicken Commitment” are available [here](#).

## 3 The U.S. chicken industry is already committed to chicken welfare.

While the “Better Chicken Commitment” attempts to promote itself as well-intentioned and science-based, its coalition members are more interested in ending animal agriculture than the health or welfare of our flocks. Moreover, the guidelines outlined in the “Better Chicken Commitment” undercut the work the industry has already done to ensure the welfare of our birds and lead customers to believe progress is not part of our core values.

**Contrary to what activists would have you believe, all current measurable data – livability, disease, condemnation, digestive and leg health – reflect that the national broiler flock is as healthy as it has ever been.**

For this reason, among others, we diligently created industry welfare guidelines with the mission of benefiting the birds and the future of our industry.

After a significant review process, [the National Chicken Council’s broiler](#) and [broiler breeder welfare guidelines](#) began certification annually in 2018 by the Professional Animal Auditor Certification Organization (PAACO), a leading authority on animal welfare auditing that provides high quality training and certification credentials for auditors and audit. Most chicken companies use the NCC guidelines as a basis for their own and, additionally, third parties and customers routinely audit to ensure companies are following the guidelines.



If you are currently weighing the possibility of pledging to the “Better Chicken Commitment,” we urge you to consult these certified guidelines to which our industry has already committed, engage with your suppliers and deliberate on the value of aligning with groups who seek to end animal agriculture.

## 4 The “Better Chicken Commitment” will have negative environmental consequences.

“The Better Chicken Commitment” fails to address its own impact on the environment, setting back the progress made possible by industry sustainability innovations and initiatives. Changing to slower-growing broilers would result in major increases in the use of resources like water, air, fuel, land, housing and litter, since these breeds are less feed efficient, require more resources on farms, and take about two weeks longer to achieve the same weight as today’s conventional broilers. These costly environmental impacts will happen without improving chicken welfare or food safety.

The U.S. broiler industry currently has one of the smallest carbon footprints in all of animal agriculture and has lowered its environmental impact by **50% in the last 50 years. Today it takes 58% less water and 72% less farmland to produce the same amount of chicken than it did in 1965.**

Study Reference: Putnam, Ben, et al. “A retrospective analysis of the United States poultry industry: 1965 compared with 2010.” *Agricultural Systems*, vol. 157, 2017, pp. 107-117.  
Note: All metrics referenced are in terms of 1000 kg of live weight broiler poultry.

Transitioning to a slower growing bird would take away those gains and create significant environmental challenges. **For example, if only one-third of U.S. chicken farms increased their production time by two weeks (which is the standard for a “slower growing” chicken,) this would have the following impacts:**

## 1 BILLION

additional **gallons of water per year** for the chickens to drink (excluding additional irrigation water that would be required to grow the additional feed).



Enough additional feed (corn/soybean meal) to fill

## 670,000

**more tractor trailers** that would be on the road per year, using millions more gallons of fuel annually.



## 28.5 BILLION

Additional pounds of manure produced annually. Slower growing chickens will stay on the farm longer, so that would be two extra weeks of poop. That is enough litter to create a pile on a football field that is 27 times higher than a typical NFL stadium.

## 5 The “Better Chicken Commitment” will take away choices from consumers.

Whether it is traditionally raised chicken, slower growing breeds, raised without antibiotics or organic, today’s consumers have choices – including products that consider many factors, such as taste preference, personal values and affordability.

For decades, the U.S. chicken industry has evolved its products to meet ever-changing consumer preferences. Adapting and offering consumers more choices has been the main catalyst of success for chicken producers -- rather than taking choices away.

If consumers are truly interested in and willing to pay for chicken that was raised according to the “Better Chicken Commitment” standards – keeping in mind these standards have yet to be proven – in the spirit of choice, they should be afforded the option. However, that’s exactly what it should be: one option, out of many choices.

## 6 The “Better Chicken Commitment” will raise the price of chicken.

There is well-founded concern that widespread implementation of slower-growing broilers alone would have a significant impact on the cost of chicken. According to a [study](#) published in the Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics, **simply switching to “slower growing” breeds would increase the cost of production cost of production from 25% to 49%.**

Another [study](#) noted that **the additional cost of even one-third of the industry switching to slower growing birds would be \$9 billion**, which could have a significant financial impact on foodservice companies, retailers, restaurants and ultimately – consumers. This will put a considerable percentage of the population at risk and increase food insecurity for those who can least afford to have changes in food prices.

## 7 The industry remains committed to continuous improvement.

**The chicken industry is always seeking ways to improve the health and welfare of their birds because without healthy birds, there would be no chicken industry.**

For decades, our industry has evolved on-farm care, transport, handling, processing and genetics to improve welfare outcomes while meeting ever-changing consumer preferences. As mentioned, adapting and offering consumers more choices has been the main catalyst of success for the chicken industries.

Whether it’s looking at space and housing, studying different nutrition programs, breeding for the healthiest birds or working to eradicate diseases, the industry is committed to continual improvement to do what is best for the bird, and ultimately, the consumer. But those changes and improvements should be based on sound science and research, not emotional rhetoric from activist groups.





## Resources

The National Chicken Council's [Chicken Check In](#) program, currently serves as a resource for consumers to get the information they seek about how most broiler chickens are raised. The website is full of resources outlining the industry's welfare commitments and best practices, including:

- [Broiler Chicken Welfare FAQs](#)
- [Why do chickens today appear to be bigger, compared to previous years?](#)
- [Space & Housing: Are chickens crammed in houses? Do chickens have enough space to move?](#)
- [Do chickens have enough space to move in growout houses?](#)
- [What is the difference between faster- and slower-growing chicken?](#)
- [What kind of litter do chickens have access to in the barns?](#)
- [How are chickens slaughtered and processed for meat?](#)
- [“How does stunning ensure that chickens are not slaughtered while conscious?” by Karen Christensen, Ph.D.](#)

In addition to this list, the industry has developed [360° virtual reality video series](#) showing the various stages of chicken's life during modern, commercial production. Along with [Life on the Farm videos](#), Chicken Check In's content provides consumers a transparent view into the process of raising chickens, from hatchery to table.

If you or your customers are looking for more information or content on chicken welfare, we are happy to share additional resources and information. We look forward to developing more helpful chicken welfare material that is pertinent to our industry and consumers, helping entities under pressure from activist groups make educated decisions.

