

A photograph of a man from behind, wearing a dark blue denim shirt, looking at a display case filled with various packaged meats and sausages. The display case has multiple shelves, each containing different types of meat products like steaks, chops, and sausages. Handwritten-style text overlays are placed across the image, providing information about the meat's origin and certification.

The Dirt on Humanewashing

A FARM FORWARD REPORT ON CONSUMER
DECEPTION IN ANIMAL WELFARE CERTIFICATION

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A Farm Forward Report on Consumer Deception in Animal Welfare Certification

ABSTRACT

This report speaks from the perspective of an animal protection group long committed to animal welfare certification and asks to what extent today's animal welfare certifications are informing consumers about the state of animal agriculture, and to what extent they function to deceive consumers. In sum, it asks about the existence, pervasiveness, and severity of *humanewashing*. The report's most significant finding is that even the more rigorous independent certifications, which were designed in part as a response to the failure of industry-led certifications, deceive consumers by branding as humane products from animals raised in intensive confinement on concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), animals deprived adequate exercise and socialization, animals genetically modified in ways that promote disease, cattle whose calves are taken from them shortly after birth, and male chicks who are killed en masse immediately after hatching. Additionally, it finds that a growing number of welfare certifications are employing new, sophisticated tactics aimed at misleading consumers, including exploiting consumer anxiety about the role of livestock in creating pandemics like COVID-19 and other health risks. In sum, humanewashing is occurring not only at industry-led certifications, but also at highly regarded

certifications connected with leading animal protection groups and retailers. This widespread consumer deception decreases momentum for change and stabilizes factory farming. How advocates and consumers can respond to this situation is considered at the end of this report but remains largely beyond its scope; its focus is instead on documenting the fact and nature of an increasingly widespread form of consumer deception.



THE DIRT ON HUMANEWASHING

Background

Animal welfare certification is widely regarded as a vehicle to improve farmed animal welfare and to work towards an alternative to factory farming. The group authoring this report, Farm Forward, has been for more than a decade among a small handful of animal protection groups noted for their efforts to champion this potential of farmed animal welfare certification, but recent developments have prompted a reconsideration.

PAST ENGAGEMENT WITH WELFARE CERTIFICATION

The negative conclusions about certification reached through this study throw into question the value of some of the animal protection movement's past work, including Farm Forward's. Since its founding in 2007, Farm Forward has actively endorsed select animal welfare certifications with a particular emphasis on improving them by ratcheting up their standards, addressing genetic causes of poor welfare, and helping consumers distinguish meaningful certifications from those certifications that are crass industry attempts at deception (Farm Forward 2017). Farm Forward has also, until recently, served continuously on the board of the nation's largest independent animal welfare certification, Global Animal Partnership (GAP). Over more than a decade, three different Farm Forward staff members served on GAP's board, investing more than 1,000 staff hours in working toward effective animal welfare certification. Farm Forward served as

GAP grew from a mere idea into a massive machine providing certification for thousands of farms and more than 400 million animals. Such efforts are not without some merit but, as this report will make clear, the need of the day has dramatically changed now that certifications are growing. In April 2020, Farm Forward resigned from GAP's board out of concern that our presence implied an endorsement of GAP's increasing moves both to disempower consumers and to increase industry control over its standards.⁰¹ High-functioning animal welfare certification is theoretically possible, but in the contemporary U.S. it appears to be one of those commonsense ideas that is impossible to do well given current political exigencies.

DEFINING HUMANEWASHING

As this report defines it, **humanewashing consists of efforts to market animal products by promoting the illusion of animal well-being while concealing the extent of animals' illness and suffering.** This deceptive marketing takes different forms: label claims ("humanely raised," "cage-free"), imagery on packages or websites (animals roaming on pasture), and certifications (United States Department of Agriculture's National Organic Program, American Humane Certified). This final category—animal welfare certifications—is the focus of this report. Welfare certifications are designed, ostensibly, to help consumers



identify animal products consistent with their ethical concerns, but many are intentionally deceptive, and all are problematic. They generally function to confuse consumers, lock truly high welfare animal farmers out of important markets, and thwart the kinds of reforms necessary to phase out industrialized farming.

EMERGING HUMANEWASHING TECHNIQUES

The report is further motivated by and relays the recent emergence of a new, “second generation” of certifications that combine humanewashing, greenwashing, and healthwashing to deceive consumers who are concerned about the nexus of human, animal, and environmental health.

(Vieira de Freitas Netto et al. 2020; Stan 2017). As the American public recognizes agribusiness’s disregard for both workers and animals, and as political leaders call for us to reform or even reject CAFOs, humanewashing is entering a golden age of sophistication, employing tactics that threaten those reforms (Skerritt 2020; Booker 2019).

SCOPE OF STUDY

This report considers the most prominent certifications in use in the United States (see Table 1) and, as much as possible, makes statements that apply to all of them. We took this approach because, despite important differences between them, welfare certifications are often treated as or thought to be a single phenomenon (Strom 2017; Animal Welfare Institute 2019).

Certifications can be classified into at least two categories: first are thinly masked marketing tools, what this report calls **industry certifications**, and second are certifications with ties to animal protection organizations, what this report calls **independent certifications**. While this report documents industry certifications’ extensive consumer deception, an even more important finding is that even independent certifications have become entangled in humanewashing.

CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

While additional studies could enrich and add greater precision to our knowledge, the present state of research into consumers’ attitudes toward the role certifications should play in ensuring farmed animal welfare is sufficiently advanced to confidently conclude that consumers are being willfully misled. Evidence is abundant that consumers care about animal wellbeing (Prickett, Norwood, and Lusk 2010; ASPCA 2016; Packaged Facts 2017; Consumer Reports National Research Center 2014). Given the state of animal welfare today, consumer expectations are high, going well beyond simply providing adequate food, water, and shelter. For example, Consumer Reports found that 75 percent of consumers want humane labels to ensure that animals were raised



Certification	Managed By	Legal Status of Managing Entity	Farm Forward Classification
American Humane Certified (AHC)	American Humane (AH)	501(c)(3) nonprofit	Industry certification
Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM)	National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF)	Industry trade group	Industry certification
One Health Certified (OHC)	National Institute of Antimicrobial Resistance Research and Education (NIAMRRE)	A center affiliated with Iowa State University	Industry certification
United Egg Producers (UEP) Certified	UEP	Industry trade group	Industry certification
Certified Humane (CH)	Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC)	501(c)(3) nonprofit	Independent certification
Global Animal Partnership (GAP)	GAP	501(c)(3) nonprofit	Independent certification
National Organic Program (NOP) ⁰²	United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)	Government agency	Independent certification
Animal Welfare Approved (AWA)	A Greener World (AGW)	501(c)(3) nonprofit	Independent certification

Table 1. Animal welfare certifications in the United States

without being confined to cages, 90 percent want them to ensure “adequate living space,” 88 percent want humane slaughter, 79 percent want outdoor access, and 92 percent want inspections to verify the welfare claims (Consumer Reports National Research Center 2014).⁰³ Consumers also appear willing to pay more for such products.⁰⁴ Additionally, consumers are becoming more concerned about the environmental and public health implications of animal agriculture.⁰⁵ This data strongly suggests that Americans continue to be committed to broad anti-cruelty principles, and that they expect welfare certifications to meet, at minimum, what might

be considered “commonsense” animal welfare requirements, like access to the outdoors. Unfortunately, as this report will detail, certifications typically do not even approximately meet these consumer expectations.

In an animal agriculture system like that in the U.S. where 95 to 99 percent of animals are raised on factory farms, there is an enormous gulf between industry norms and consumer values.⁰⁶ As a result, consumers look to claims on product packaging to play a role in identifying healthier and more ethical animal products; industry, by contrast, looks to these claims as an opportunity to obscure this differential.

NEW CONSUMER TRENDS

Consumers have already become more discerning about the product claims they trust, and increasingly they are turning to welfare certification rather than putting their confidence in mere label claims, like “all natural” and “humanely raised.” For example, Nielsen research shows that from 2016 to 2018, sales of eggs accompanied by unregulated and weakly-defined claims like “all natural” decreased by 20 percent; meanwhile, sales of welfare-certified eggs grew by 57 percent (Nielsen Product Insider 2016-2018). See Addendum II for an overview of several common deceptive label claims that stop short of certification



(which requires standards and audit procedures, whereas label claims are simply intended as descriptors). In sum, the rise of welfare certifications and the substantial investment in supporting them by both industry and animal protection groups has occurred in response to an increasingly educated consumer base that cares about welfare and wants more information about their animal products. It is of crucial importance to recognize that certifications are growing at precisely the moment that claims like "all natural" and "free range" that still comfort consumers have become, or are on the verge of becoming, less effective.

Welfare certifications, looked at in this historical context, appear to serve as replacements for the advertising advantage that once was conferred by less or totally unregulated claims. The move from meaningless phrases to welfare certifications that have at least minimal standards may reduce the suffering of some animals raised on CAFOs. This move, however, also preserves the gulf between consumer values and actual practices, all but foreclosing the possibility of creating the kind of non-confinement-based animal agriculture that consumers seem to want. Whatever the intentions may be, welfare certifications function to preserve the invisibility of CAFOs by, at best, offering the sop of minor welfare improvements, and, quite often, offering the mere appearance of high welfare.



THE DIRT ON HUMANEWASHING

Certifications are Designed to Deceive



THE DIRT ON HUMANEWASHING

Certifications are Designed to Deceive

A common myth is often subtly put forth that imagines animal welfare certification as a happy partnership between well-meaning corporations (often conflated with actual farmers, who are more likely to be aligned with consumers), animal advocacy organizations, and animal welfare scientists. GAP, for example, touts its “multi-stakeholder approach.” The research prepared for this study combined with decades of first-hand experience, including the experience of serving on GAP’s board every year since its inception, makes it clear that animal welfare certification, in the limited instances when it has been more than a cynical industry ploy, has, in reality, been highly agonistic and conflict-ridden. When corporations actually improve welfare at all, they do so to the extent that consumers and their representation through animal welfare groups hold corporations’ feet to the fire. Yet, the self-serving narrative put forth both by the corporations and some animal welfare groups working with them gives the impression that the agribusiness industry is cooperating and genuinely trying to address welfare issues to the extent possible.

This is not to deny that there are many farmers, ranchers, and even employees of agribusiness companies that sincerely would like to see the elimination of factory farming; they exist but are largely powerless. Most large meat companies now employ professionals to handle negotiations with animal protection groups. Sometimes

these professionals sincerely want to see welfare improvements, but rather than empowering such individuals to make real change, agribusiness companies utilize their sincerity as a smokescreen. Less experienced negotiators from animal protection groups are regularly deceived. The deception of the public thus occurs at two levels: techniques like certifications function to deceive the masses, and more sophisticated techniques, like assigning professionals to “manage” nonprofit groups demanding change, function to neutralize or weaken resistance from animal welfare professionals.

This report focuses on the vehicles of public deception in two ways: first by moving systematically through each certification it considers in the section immediately below, and then, under “Neglected Animal Welfare Issues,” proceeding systematically to consider especially neglected issues noting how each certification addresses or fails to address them.



An Overview of Current Welfare Certifications

CERTIFICATIONS PRODUCED BY TRADE INDUSTRY BODIES

One way producers and retailers have capitalized on consumers' growing interest in certifications is by creating their own certifications in much the same way that a think tank run by industry-paid lobbyists endorses a piece of legislation. Unsurprisingly, the certifications run by industry bodies simply codify and commend the current industry's cruel practices.

EGG INDUSTRY: UEP CERTIFIED

For example, starting in 2002, the United Egg Producers (UEP), a nationwide marketing cooperative of egg farmers that together produce roughly 90 percent of the eggs in the U.S., launched their own certification program (United Egg Producers 2020a). The UEP Certified label now adorns more than 85 percent of U.S. egg cartons (United Egg Producers 2020b). UEP's bare-bones standards lack even the most basic provisions for hen well-being and merely describe conditions within current industrial egg production. They do not, for example, require nesting boxes or perches; continuous caging is permitted (except under the separate cage-free certification); hens can be debeaked routinely. Although UEP Certified farms are audited, inspections allow up to 10 percent noncompliance, and consumers are not informed about which standards are and are not met (United Egg Producers 2017). The certification is akin to 90 percent of cigarette

producers coming together to create a "U.S. Cigarette Producers Certified Safer" label in order to make their products stand out on shelves as safer. UEP Certified fails even to raise the floor of animal welfare within the egg industry.

DAIRY INDUSTRY: FARM PROGRAM

Similar humanewashing tactics are used by the dairy industry. The industry's website for its Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) certification program proudly proclaims, "We Set the Standards" (National Milk Producers Federation 2020b)—and that is true. The FARM standards are administered by the National Milk Producers Federation (NMPF), a trade group whose stated mission is "to foster an economic and political climate in which dairy producers ... can thrive and prosper," which in turn "helps improve the bottom line of the associate members" (2020a). Even a cursory review of the standards makes evident that welfare is not a central concern: cows can be denied access to pasture, and calves are virtually always taken from their mothers just after birth and confined in crates, causing cognitive deficits, impaired social skills, greater fearfulness, and amplified reactions to stressors (Costa, von Keyserlingk, and Weary 2016; Jensen and Larsen 2014).

THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATIONS CONTROLLED BY INDUSTRY INTEREST

It is reasonable for consumers to expect that unlike the two industry-run programs reviewed above, third-party certifications would be more trustworthy. However, some of these technically third-party certifications have been designed both to perpetuate and conceal industry influence. Such certifications are established



by nonprofits or institutions that appear to be watchdogs, but are in fact connected to, and operate for the benefit of, the animal agriculture industry. The welfare outcomes on farms that participate in these certification programs are likely to be functionally indistinguishable from those of industry-promulgated certifications like UEP Certified, and therefore this report categorizes them together.

AMERICAN HUMANE CERTIFIED

At the epicenter of this phenomenon is American Humane Certified (AHC), the farmed animal welfare certification program of the American Humane (AH), a 130-year-old charity that claims it was “the first to serve in promoting and nurturing the bond between animals and humans” (2020a). AHC is a third-party-audited animal welfare certification scheme that claims to be the largest in the world, overseeing approximately 1 billion animals (American Humane 2020c). AH is best known for its controversial “No Animals Were Harmed” stamp on movies, which has come under fire in recent years after multiple reports surfaced of abuse of animals on Hollywood film sets (Welsh 2013). After removing AH as a beneficiary in his will, former supporter Bob Barker asserted, “I think they have failed miserably in their efforts to protect animals in the movie industry, and obviously they have failed miserably in any protection for animals in the food industry” (Johnson 2018).

According to Consumer Reports, AHC’s “requirements for providing animals comfortable living conditions and allowing them to engage in natural behaviors are limited and don’t apply to every animal species” (2020). The standards largely fail to

improve conditions beyond industry conventions. Some standard CAFO practices condoned by the AHC label include crate confinement for gestating and nursing sows, permanent indoor confinement (except for layer chickens when additionally certified as “free range” or “pasture raised”), no limits on transportation duration for cattle, and dehorning of cows. Certified farms can fail to meet up to 15 percent of the standards, with consumers left in the dark about which ones, and about whether even the most basic welfare standards have been met (American Humane Certified 2019). According to independent consumer labeling guides published by the animal protection charity Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), AHC standards are the lowest of any third-party certification scheme (2020).

AHC suppliers have been repeatedly exposed for animal abuse, often egregious. As shown in Figure 1a, a 2015 undercover investigation of a slaughterhouse run by AHC-approved Foster Farms documented chickens being scalded alive while conscious. The investigation also substantiated claims made widely in peer-reviewed literature that breeding for extremely rapid growth causes debilitating leg injuries and deformities (Mercy For Animals 2015; Kestin et al. 2001; Knowles et al. 2008; Granquist et al. 2019). In response, AH laid blame on individual workers and defended its relationship with Foster Farms, stating to media, “We don’t want to tell a company just because of their size it’s impossible for them to be humane” (Marmor Shaw 2016). Another investigation at a Foster Farms turkey hatchery (see Figure 1b) documented poult’s beaks and toes being seared off and unwanted birds being sealed in plastic bags in which they suffocated or starved, rather than being dispatched by more costly



Figure 1. Conditions documented at AHC producers



A lame bird denied vet care at Foster Farms
(Mercy For Animals 2015)



Live turkey chicks discarded in plastic bags at
Foster Farms (Animal Outlook 2015)



Injured turkey denied veterinary care at
Butterball (Mercy For Animals 2014a)

methods of euthanasia approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) (Animal Outlook 2015).

Butterball, another poultry giant certified by AHC, has been the subject of multiple investigations, each documenting serious abuse. As early as 2006, workers were filmed stomping on and slamming turkeys against walls (PETA 2006). Later investigations conducted between 2011 and 2014 (see Figure 1c) found turkeys having their toes amputated without anesthetics and injured birds being denied veterinary care (Mercy For Animals 2014a). AHC continues to certify Butterball to this day.

AHC's stunningly low bar comes into focus when one considers the source of its funding. In 2018, the AHC program generated more than \$800,000 in revenue (IRS 2018c), much of it from fees paid by companies like Butterball and Foster Farms that use the AHC label on products (Weiss and Sullins 2012). Because AHC, and AH more broadly, relies on fees generated from its

certifications to maintain its operation, there is a strong disincentive for AHC to set welfare standards higher than what its biggest customers have already adopted, lest it risk losing revenue. As a result, AHC is structurally disincentivized to improve animal welfare for the producers it certifies, which explains its massive size relative to more meaningful certifications. In 2015, AHC reported a more than 1,000 percent jump in the number of animals who were raised on AHC certified farms (American Humane 2015).

AH is aware that consumers are highly concerned about farmed animal welfare. Its own 2013 study found that 74 percent of people were willing to pay more for "humane" products, with more than a third of shoppers willing to pay premiums of up to 20 percent for humane labels (American Humane 2013). Yet instead of increasing AHC's standards to meet consumers' expectations, AH recruits ever more CAFO-based producers and leverages celebrities, including Hugh Jackman and Betty White, to bolster the organization's



credibility (American Humane 2020b). AHC is simply a marketing scheme designed to facilitate the efforts of its industrial clients to deceive consumers about the actual state of animal agriculture.

ONE HEALTH CERTIFIED: THE NEXT GENERATION OF HUMANEWASHING

For many shoppers, concern for animal welfare goes hand-in-hand with concern for sustainability and public health.²⁷ The One Health Certified (OHC) certification represents the next generation of industry marketing schemes following the AHC model, and it fully exploits increasing consumer interest in not only welfare, but also sustainability and health. As shown in Figure 2, the OHC description and logo were designed to appear holistic and include a check-marked list of five primary health indicators: biosecurity, veterinary care, antibiotic restrictions, animal welfare, and environmental impact. In actual fact, like AHC, the OHC

certification is primarily a marketing service for CAFOs while codifying existing or emerging industry standard practices.

OHC is parasitic upon the promising new public health framework from which it takes its name, One Health, which was designed to draw attention to the interconnections between human, environmental, and animal health. According to the One Health Commission, "One Health is a collaborative, multisectoral, and trans-disciplinary approach . . . to achieve optimal health and well-being outcomes recognizing the interconnections between people, animals, plants and their shared environment" (One Health Commission 2020). The One Health approach (unlike OHC) has been embraced by dozens of prominent institutions, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which operates the CDC One Health Office (CDC 2016). As a concept, One Health first gained recognition among academics, researchers, and

Figure 2. One Health Certified: The “next generation” of humanewashing



Butterball turkey bears the “all natural” claim and the AHC logo in the lower-right corner



Certified Organic Perdue chicken



The OHC label on Aldi's Kirkwood brand chicken

public health advocates, but the emergence of COVID-19 has made the global public more aware of the connections between human and animal health and increased the prominence of the One Health concept.

Through the OHC label, the meat industry is attempting to co-opt the One Health brand to deceive consumers about the nature of its products at a time when consumers are scrutinizing animal agriculture's role in environmental degradation, antibiotic resistance, and chronic and infectious diseases more than ever (Foer and Gross 2020; Clark et al. 2019). OHC has no affiliation with the aforementioned One Health Commission or the One Health initiatives of the WHO and CDC. Rather, OHC is the brainchild of the nation's sixth largest poultry producer, Mountaire Farms (Ritter 2020). It is administered by a seemingly independent organization called the National Institute of Antimicrobial Resistance Research and Education (NIAMRRE), based at Iowa State University.

NIAMRRE is a fox in the henhouse pretending to be watchdog. NIAMRRE's relationship with Mountaire can be traced to the very beginning: Mountaire applied for the OHC trademark in 2017 and was the first and, so far, the only meat company to adopt the program (United States Patent and Trademark Office 2020). According to a NIAMRRE brochure, OHC standards were developed by a committee of "technical experts from multiple stakeholders with equal representation from animal agriculture, allied industry organizations, and universities" (2020). Members of this committee include turkey and pork industry leaders, as well as G. Don Ritter, DVM, ACPV, the Director of Technical Marketing

of Mountaire Farms (One Health Certification Foundation 2020c). In addition to academic and nongovernmental institutions, animal product trade groups and retailers may join NIAMRRE as members by paying \$15,000 annually (NIAMRRE 2019). Similar to AHC, producers also pay \$7,500 annually to be certified (Ritter 2020). Thus, like AHC, NIAMRRE and OHC rely on industry funds to operate, creating a fundamental conflict of interest.

Ritter has been surprisingly transparent about the goal of OHC, stating that the best way to market poultry is through certifications—and framing OHC as the "next generation" of certification. He argues that the primary purpose of a label is to "reduce consumer concerns about buying [a] product" and cites a survey revealing that 83 percent of respondents claimed they would buy OHC products after being shown the label and being given a brief description of the program (Ritter 2020). One would be pressed to find a more direct description of what actually drives certifications. Ritter's argument that the label's goal is to "reduce . . . concerns" reveals what it is not designed to do: actually require companies to engage in the costly work of changing a cruel and broken system.

OHC standards show major deficiencies in each category. For example, medically important antibiotics may be used to "treat and control disease" with the woefully insufficient caveat that they "must be administered in a manner that minimizes the number of animals treated and used for the least number of days necessary to achieve effective treatment outcomes" (One Health Certification Foundation 2020b, 12). The standards fail to



establish a limit on the duration for which antibiotics can be used and what measures must be taken to ensure animals do not get sick in the first place. Although the standards require action plans to correct problems after multiple flocks have received antibiotics (One Health Certification Foundation 2020b), OHC standards do nothing to alleviate the crowded conditions within CAFOs that facilitate the spread of diseases, infections, and parasites (Gilchrist et al. 2007). OHC also allows the routine use of antibiotics that are described as “nonmedically important” for human use. This means that drugs such as ionophores and bacitracin “may be used to maintain animal health and welfare” (One Health Certification Foundation 2020a). In practice, these classes of drugs are often fed to animals continuously to compensate for unsanitary conditions (Martin, Thottathil, and Newman 2015). According to an article published in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, “[E]ven some nonmedically important antibiotics can lead to coselection of genes that confer broad-spectrum resistance to drugs, including medically important antibiotics,” leading the authors to recommend that their use “should be limited to the greatest extent possible without sacrificing animal health and welfare” (Kahn et al. 2019, 31).

OHC’s animal welfare standards are even worse than its antibiotic standards. Producers can choose between basic industry trade group standards⁰⁸ or AHC, the very certification that this report documents is nothing more than a marketing tool for major animal agriculture companies.

The One Health concept is an important public health framework that helps policymakers and the public make connections between

human and non-human animal health. Its focus, rightly, is on the risks of factory farming to public health. OHC’s coopting of the phrase to cast standard industry practices in a more favorable light is as cynical as it appears. By offering a false sense of security to consumers, OHC promises to be an effective tool for industry to continue to preserve the illusion of choice—the illusion that there are widely available alternatives to the dominant CAFO model.

INDEPENDENT CERTIFICATIONS ALSO HUMANEWASH

All humanewashing is not equal. This report has, thus far, discussed how industry certifications like UEP Certified, as well as industry certifications masquerading as independent watchdogs like AHC and OHC, are primarily designed as tools of humanewashing and do nothing to improve animal welfare above standard practices. The standards of **independent certifications** like Certified Humane (CH), run by the nonprofit Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC), and Global Animal Partnership (GAP), however, can amount to more meaningful welfare improvements. This has been possible because these certifications were established with more distance from the animal agriculture industry: rather than industry executives, HFAC’s board and scientific advisory committee include animal welfare advocates with backgrounds at organizations like World Animal Protection, the Humane Society of the United States, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Humane Farm Animal Care 2020b). GAP was also created with this balance in mind: historically the board has had equal representation from animal protection groups (since Farm Forward left the board, the remaining groups are the American



Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Compassion in World Farming, and Humane Society International) in addition to industry leaders (Global Animal Partnership 2020d). Historically HFAC and GAP have involved true attempts by animal welfare advocates to help consumers identify products from animals who are raised with at least some modest improvement over standard industry practices. However, as we have noted, welfare certification is conflict-ridden. Ultimately, groups like HFAC and GAP do not have their hands on the steering wheel, or at least not most of the time. These certifications cannot go about their business or so much as get a single certification mark on a single package without cooperation from the factory farming industry. The result may be somewhat better for animals than that of industry certifications, but, considering what consumers expect from welfare certifications, remains deceptive.

GLOBAL ANIMAL PARTNERSHIP AND CERTIFIED HUMANE

GAP and Certified Humane can improve the lives of farmed animals over standard industry practice. For instance, both require some measure of environmental enrichments. They prohibit debeaking of birds, routine tail docking of pigs, and the tethering of calves, and laying hens cannot be caged—although they still may only have 1 (CH) or 1.5 (GAP) square feet of space each (Global Animal Partnership 2020a; Humane Farm Animal Care 2020a). These sound like and indeed are important goods, and they give an indication of why, until earlier this year, Farm Forward served on GAP's board and why other animal groups still do. This report does not wish to deny that GAP and CH products are likely to come from animals who suffered less. The question,

rather, is whether they indicate a *humane* product, which is, in the end, what everyone wants to know.

This report takes on this question by narrowing its focus to five forms of cruelty consistently overlooked by animal welfare certifications, but that are all incompatible with any reasonable definition of humane. Significantly, all of these issues are either entirely the product of CAFOs or have been aggravated by them—that is to say, there is nothing necessary about them:

1. Intensively confining animals instead of raising them primarily on pasture,
2. insufficiently exercising and socializing animals,
3. utilizing genetically modified animals prone to disease and chronic pain,
4. preventing natural weaning periods in the dairy industry,
5. culling all newborn male chicks.

Both GAP and CH functionally have multiple levels of certification, some more rigorous than others. While a starkly limited number of GAP and CH certified products avoid the first two of these five welfare problems, not even the most restrictive certification levels of GAP and CH prevent the latter three (note that GAP is still developing dairy standards). See Figure 3 for a systematic breakdown of these differences (and several are considered further below).



American Certifications on Underconsidered Welfare Issues

REQUIRED FOR ALL ANIMALS IN PROGRAM	AMERICAN HUMANE CERTIFIED	ONE HEALTH CERTIFIED	NATIONAL ORGANIC PROGRAM	CERTIFIED HUMANE	GLOBAL ANIMAL PARTNERSHIP	ANIMAL WELFARE APPROVED
I. Animals raised on pasture	X	X	X	X*	X*	✓
II. Sufficient exercise and socialization	X	X	X	X*	X*	✓
III. Animals bred with healthy enough genetics to engage in natural behaviors throughout lifespan	X	X	X	X	X	09
IV. Natural weaning periods	X	X	X	X	X	10
V. Eliminates culling of newborn male chicks	X	X	X	X	X	11

X* Does not apply for the majority of animals within the program, only limited products labeled with specific tiers or qualifiers.



Figure 3.

While empirical evidence demonstrates that a significant number of consumers care about the humane treatment of animals, we have much less data on exactly what they really mean by this.¹² We do know some things, however. For example, earlier in this

are from animals raised on pasture and where animals are able to socialize (addressing I and II above). So, in rare cases, a GAP or Certified Humane product may come from an animal raised on pasture, and, if a consumer knows the arcana of what to look for, they can be relatively certain of that. However, if one's definition

report we reviewed data suggesting that a large number of consumers believe that a humane product means that animals are raised outdoors and are able to move and interact with others of their kind, which would suggest that, at an absolute minimum, issues I and II above should be prohibited by all welfare-certified products. To the extent that consumers will assume that a certification mark from GAP or Certified Humane always means animals are raised on pasture, these certifications contribute to humanewashing. We do not have a precise number of how many Americans are deceived, but it would, at minimum, run into many millions.¹³

While not requiring outdoor access, both GAP and Certified Humane do at least provide a pathway for consumers to identify products that



of humane precludes the use of animals who were genetically modified to the point where they cannot engage in natural behaviors (III above) or the other cruelties IV-V, GAP and Certified Humane will function to deceive. In fact, these certifications either entirely ignore these welfare issues or provide half measures that may or may not actually reduce overall suffering, as detailed below.

This report has demonstrated that outdoor access is the welfare issue that we have the most evidence consumers care about and expect from a certification, so it is particularly disturbing that even independent certifications like CH and GAP obfuscate this point and primarily certify animals in intensive confinement. While not as deceptive as AHC and OHC, CH and GAP still therefore engage in a rather dramatic form of humanewashing.

ANIMAL WELFARE APPROVED

One independent certification, A Greener World's (AGW's) Animal Welfare Approved (AWA), stands out as anomalous: it is both the smallest and the most rigorous. It is the only certification that avoids the particularly disturbing humanewashing involved in certifying as humane products from animals raised in intensive confinement, thus avoiding Welfare Issues I and II above. According to AGW, AWA "is the only label that guarantees animals are raised outdoors on pasture or range for their entire lives on an independent farm" (2020a). We concur with this part of their self-assessment.

However, AWA, too, struggles with the reality that other forms of cruelty are so pervasive in modern animal agriculture that even it

cannot insist these cruelties be banned and continue to operate. AWA fails to prevent the forced separation of calves and mother cows before natural weaning, or the mass killing of male chicks, Welfare Issues IV and V. Its more serious limitation, however, regards Welfare Issue III, the use of genetic lines of animals prone to disease and chronic pain, in the chicken industry. As explained in more detail below under "Welfare Issue III" and in Addendum I, the welfare of chickens today is affected most profoundly not by how they are raised, but by the genetic line the farmer chooses to raise. Different genetic lines are associated with different rates of growth, and numerous studies have demonstrated that *the more rapid the rate of growth, the more animal suffering is associated with it* (both for the birds sold to consumers and for specialized breeding birds who never come to market, as detailed under "Welfare Issue III").¹⁴ AWA does place some restrictions on rates of growth but still allows for rates accelerated through aggressive modern "hybrid" breeding to be *more than twice historic norms*. Prior to the invention of growth-accelerating "hybrid" breeding techniques after World War II, a fast-growing chicken breed would reach its market weight at around 112 days, gaining perhaps 20 to 23 grams per day (The Livestock Conservancy 2020); these "heritage" breeds are, to AWA's credit, recommended by AWA for their superior welfare—but they are not required. Since World War II, hybrid breeding techniques accelerated the growth rate so that today's birds can reach market weight in as few as 35 days with an average daily gain of 75 grams per day (Cobb-Vantress 2020). These fast-growth and high-profit birds—now the norm—are chronically sick and immunocompromised, suffering from unnecessary and painful problems with skeletal development, heart and lung function



(McKay et al. 2000), obesity (Wang et al. 2009), and more. The limit AWA places on growth is 40 grams per day (A Greener World 2018b).¹⁵ To its credit, this makes AWA the only certification to completely prohibit the very fastest-growing strains of birds, but it is still a weak enough restriction to cause a range of welfare problems.

Serving to confuse consumers further, even though birds growing at a rate of 40 grams per day grow far faster than do heritage breeds, they are often marketed to consumers as “slower-growth”—without clarification that they are the “slower-growing” end of the fastest-growing chickens the world has ever known. Again, see Addendum I for a fuller picture of the role poultry genetics play in welfare.

It is easy to understand why AWA makes fewer compromises than do other certifications: it is the only one that does not function primarily as a service provided to industrial farms to assist their marketing. It is also, unsurprisingly, the only certification that does not depend heavily on funds from the farms it is certifying to pay for certification. Like AHC and OHC, both GAP and CH charge producers to become certified, and both report hundreds of thousands of dollars in program service fee revenue every year (IRS 2018b, 2018a). Rather than subsist on certification fees from producers, AWA is funded by grants and individual donations. AWA certification is free for farmers, except for a modest \$100 application fee and a subsidized audit fee of between \$90 and \$120 based on farm size; the actual cost of audits to AGW is between \$840 and \$870 (A Greener World 2020b). By subsidizing most of these costs through its own fundraising and

keeping the certification itself free, AWA serves a public mission to support small-scale family farmers.

It is, unfortunately, also easy to understand why AWA makes the compromises it does. If it did not, a significant number of the farmers using its system could not participate. This is how even AWA, the only certification that does not actively promote products from animals raised in intensive confinement, engages in what could be called humanewashing. For example, consumers who are expecting AWA to ensure that their chicken and turkey meat is from animals who were not genetically modified in ways that cause unnecessary animal suffering will be deceived. The same is true of consumers who would expect a welfare certification to prevent the forced separation of cows from their offspring before weaning or to prevent the immediate slaughter of all male chicks born to egg-laying strains.

If AWA is also implicated in humanewashing, which is debatable, it is not nearly so egregious as is the case with CH and GAP. The overall impression one gets with AWA is that the program is trying to do right by animals but is in an impossible situation and so is more or less coerced into a certain amount of doublespeak, like describing growth-accelerated poultry strains as “high welfare.” CH and GAP, by contrast, are influenced or driven by industry forces that try willfully to deceive consumers, and this is perhaps unavoidable given their reliance not only on industry cooperation, but also industry funding.

The main lesson this report draws from AWA is not about the certification’s limits, which are modest compared with those of its



competitors, but about how AWA reveals the industry's lack of willingness to participate in serious welfare reform. AWA's high standards and commitment to protect smaller independent farmers have precluded its ability to scale and become widely available at major retailers nationwide.¹⁶ AWA certifies magnitudes fewer animals than do other certifications this report has considered: most AWA-certified products are only sold at small local markets and natural foods stores (A Greener World 2020c). AHC-certified products, on the other hand, are available in mainstream grocery stores nationwide (American Humane Certified 2020), and GAP boasts that it certifies 400 million animals (Global Animal Partnership 2020f). Despite consumers' interest in high welfare, pasture-raised animal products, AWA makes up only a tiny fraction of the meat market, in which certified, lower welfare products continue to grow rapidly. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the circumstances under which the meat, poultry, dairy, and egg companies that dominate the industry today would adopt AWA standards at scale. Why would they with options like AHC and OHC available, or, if they have a more discerning clientele, CH and GAP? Thus, while AWA could partially be viewed as an exception to the humanewashing rule, its inability to achieve market scale is another datum illustrating the failure of animal welfare certification.

The Halo Effect

Before this report turns to consider in more detail how humanewashing occurs around each of the five welfare issues it

focuses upon, it considers one particularly powerful and insidious dimension of humanewashing, the halo effect. The use of the halo effect to deceive consumers is one of the principle ways that even independent certifications become humanewashers.

The halo effect occurs when producers utilize certifications (or other means) to give the impression that the most rigorous levels of certification are representative of all certified products or even totally uncertified products. For example, a brand-name company may sell 30 different chicken products, only some of which are welfare-certified; despite the fact that only a handful of welfare-certified products come from animals raised with access to the outdoors, advertising boasts of these few anomalous products and presents them as the norm for the brand.

The problem of the halo effect is exacerbated by the fact that several of the most prominent animal welfare certifications offer an explicitly tiered certification (GAP) or achieve the effect of tiers by offering special rules if producers wish to add certain descriptors, like "cage-free," to their products (AHC and CH). There is good reason to favor tiered certification: by offering multiple certification tiers with increasingly stringent standards, certifiers can accommodate lower welfare producers (e.g., GAP Steps 1 and 2) while also elevating brands that go beyond the bare minimum of their welfare standards (e.g., GAP Steps 3, 4, 5, and 5+). Tiered standards could function to give consumers more information and more options. In theory, they could also serve to start lower-welfare producers on a path to continuous improvement since customers appear willing to pay more for products in the higher tiers. Despite these potential advantages,



tiering also makes it easier for brands to deceive consumers about their welfare standards by obscuring the welfare differential between tiers.

For example, the Happy Egg Co.'s products are certified "free range" by AHC, which offers three tiers for eggs: "cage free" (but still entirely confined indoors) at the lowest end, "free range" in the middle, and "pasture raised" as the highest welfare option. According to a lawsuit filed by the Organic Consumers Association, Happy Egg Co. has used the AHC label to deliberately obscure which of the standards its eggs met. The suit alleges that the company has continued to "trade upon the consumer good will it built by using the logo deceptively on its packaging" by using "the term 'pasture raised' alongside 'free range' on its packaging, confusing or misleading consumers about which standard the Eggs meet" (Organic Consumers Association 2020).

The halo effect is especially and increasingly worrisome at GAP. Although some crucial welfare needs are left unmet, operations with GAP certification at Steps 4, 5, and 5+ do provide meaningfully higher welfare conditions for animals by eliminating intensive confinement. In the past, GAP has required the specific Step rating to be displayed on all certified products. As of 2020, however, GAP allows companies to display a generic label that does not prominently display the Step number (see Figure 4). The Step number only need be indicated in fine print on the back of the package and need not include any information to identify whether the Step is at the top or bottom of the system. All the consumer may know is the enigmatic information that the product

they have just purchased is Step 1 in a multi-Step system (perhaps concluding incorrectly that 1 is best).¹⁷ Lower welfare producers can use the generic label to obscure the level of welfare they provide and, indeed, this is the only explanation for why GAP created the generic label.¹⁸ Further, because they are no longer required to prominently display Step numbers, producers have even less incentive to strive for continuous improvement. Lower Step-certified producers thus benefit from the "halo" provided by high-Step producers without having to adopt costly welfare practices.

Figure 4. GAP Step 1 ham benefiting from the halo effect at Whole Foods Market





THE DIRT ON HUMANEWASHING

Neglected Animal Welfare Issues



THE DIRT ON HUMANEWASHING

Neglected Animal Welfare Issues

WELFARE ISSUES I AND II: OUTDOOR ACCESS, SOCIALIZATION, AND EXERCISE

This report has reviewed the abundant evidence that American consumers associate high welfare with animals raised on pasture who have access to adequate exercise and socialization (see “Consumer Expectations,” above).

Despite the clear indication that consumers expect certifications, at minimum, to prevent intensive confinement, this report found that every certification that has achieved scale—whether industry-led or independent—humanewashes on this point.

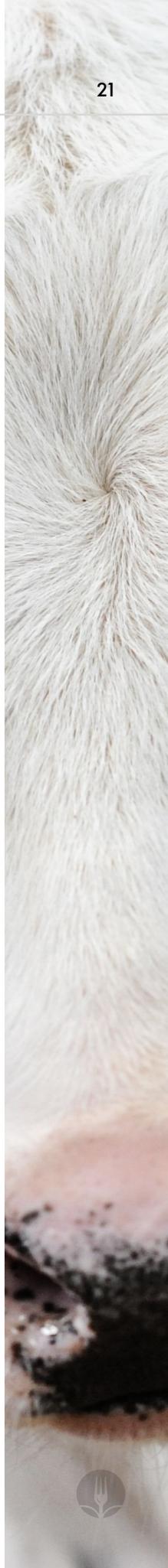
To be clear, if one reads the details of certifiers’ standards, it is quite evident that they do not require animals to be raised on pasture. The deception is not that these certifications fail to state their standards, but that they persist in describing as “certified

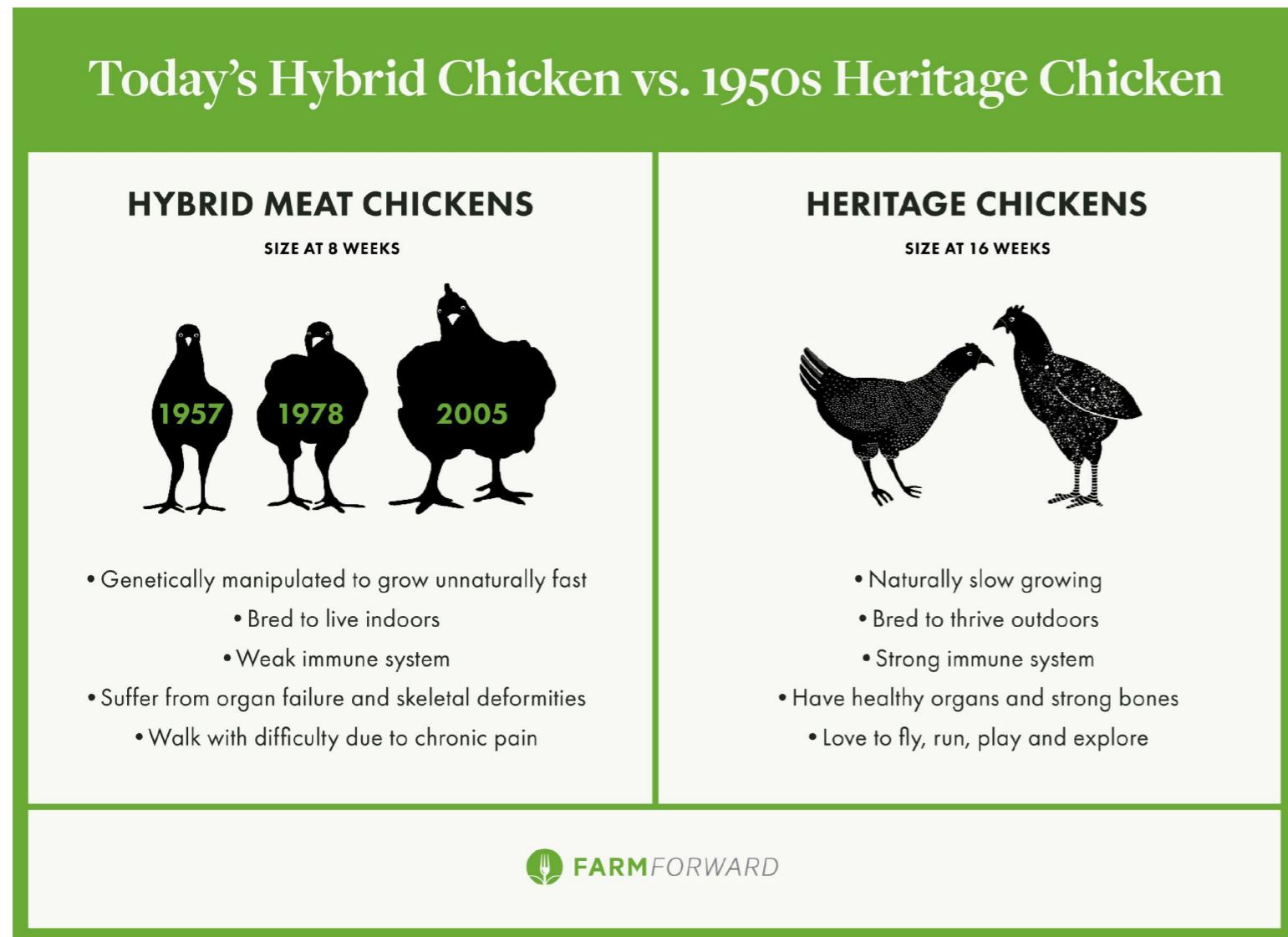
humane” and “animal welfare certified” products meeting standards that clearly fall below the threshold of commonsense ideas about animal welfare. Only AWA avoids this form of humanewashing, but for most consumers its products are either unavailable or exceptionally difficult to find, making it the exception that proves the rule.

WELFARE ISSUE III: UTILIZING GENETICALLY MODIFIED ANIMALS PRONE TO DISEASE

Despite superficial claims to the contrary, no certification today mandates high welfare genetics for broiler chickens. This is especially concerning because over the last 60 or so years, the traditional heritage chickens and turkeys that still dominate most people’s imaginations have been replaced almost entirely by fast-growing strains of birds bred through unprecedented techniques of genetic modification, as shown in Figure 5. These birds suffer from a wide range of diseases and typically experience pain from walking at the end of their life (Knowles et al. 2008). Parent stock suffer especially intensely (Mench 2002). See Addendum I on broiler chicken genetics for a more complete overview.

At present, most shoppers do not understand the degree to which genetics impacts health and welfare, which makes it difficult to



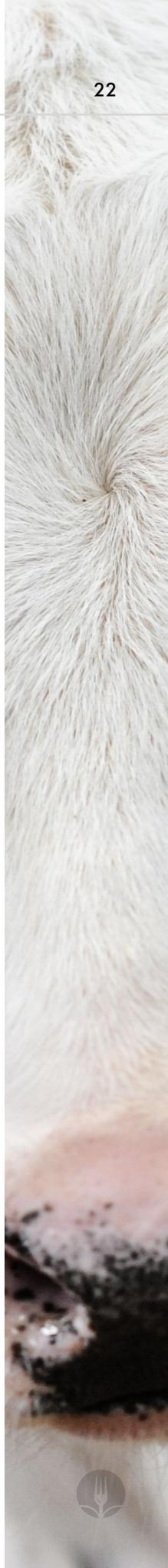
**Figure 5.**

know precisely how concerned most Americans would be with the suffering poor genetics produce compared with other more familiar kinds of suffering. Further research to understand consumer perceptions and acceptance of the genetic modification of chickens through hybrid breeding techniques is a desideratum, but, in the absence of contradictory evidence, we believe the commonsense assumption that consumers don't want sickly birds,

especially if they are genetically modified to be sickly, is valid. In any case, animal welfare certifications certainly seem to think consumers want to hear that animals are genetically healthy, and humanewashing on this point is particularly egregious.

Certified Humane says that "care must be taken to select birds for high welfare traits and avoid genetic strains with undesirable traits," but does not list specific breed requirements (Humane Farm Animal Care 2014a)—advancing what amounts to an "anything goes" policy regarding the selective breeding of chickens. Similarly, GAP requires that "[b]reeds/lines/strains must be chosen for good leg health and for low levels of mortality"

(2020b, 12). As discussed above, GAP certifies producers according to increasingly strict welfare tiers (from Step 1 at the low end through 5+ at the high end), but currently offers no guidance for meeting its "good leg health and . . . low levels of mortality" criteria for Steps 1 through 3 (Global Animal Partnership 2020b).



Even at GAP's highest welfare tier, Step 5+, birds can have a growth rate of up to 35 grams per day, allowing birds to come to the current average market weight of about 2.9 kilograms between 65 and 83 days (USDA 2020; Global Animal Partnership 2020b).¹⁹ Reaching peak size for slaughter even at 83 days of age is still a far cry from the 112 days provided for the fastest heritage breeds (The Livestock Conservancy 2020). Without precisely quantifying it, basic physiology suggests that the substantial acceleration of even these growth-restricted breeds will manifest in welfare deficiencies because when an unusually high amount of energy is put into growth, it invariably means that there are fewer energetic resources available for other bodily systems, like the immune system—see Addendum I for further explanation. The degree to which the welfare of these growth-restricted breeds has been improved compared with the more common Cornish Cross strains that reach market weight at 35 to 42 days is not yet well-documented (even less work has been done to quantify the welfare differences between growth-restricted birds and heritage birds).

Unlike CH, however, GAP has committed to “replacing 100% of chicken breeds that result in poor welfare outcomes by 2024 with breeds meeting specified welfare outcomes within [its] comprehensive standards and labeling program” (Global Animal Partnership 2020c). The strains that GAP deems acceptable are still being determined based on the results of a recently conducted study at the University of Guelph, leaving the degree to which GAP will improve genetic welfare unclear. The preliminary results from the University of Guelph research indicate that despite improved overall welfare, some of these breeds may still suffer

similar problems as Cornish Cross strains, such as footpad lesions and decreased use of enrichments over time (Torrey, Kiarie, and Widowski 2020). Today, both CH and GAP still allow the fast-growing Cornish Cross strains that are the standard within the poultry industry.

As mentioned previously, AWA still allows hybrid strains of birds but sets a maximum growth rate for chickens of 40 grams per day (A Greener World 2018b), which would bring chickens to the current average slaughter weight of 2.9 kilograms in about 72 days (40 days faster than the fastest strains of heritage chickens). If a human child had their growth accelerated like this, it would be something akin to hitting puberty not at, say, age 12, but 7; it is a profound intervention into the chicken’s genome.

Even with the assumption that growth limits like these make birds suffer less, serious welfare concerns remain unaddressed in the breeding lines that are crossed to produce meat chickens. These “grandparent” and “parent” birds are never taken to market. Even the growth-restricted birds AWA and GAP Step 5+ allow will require raising some fast-growing lines for breeding purposes. These fast-growing grandparent and parent birds suffer particularly acutely. For many breeding birds, genetic modification for fast growth has interfered with the normal development of satiation mechanisms, so birds will harm themselves by overeating in an impossible attempt to achieve satiety (Morrissey et al. 2014). As a result, their feed is restricted to prevent excessive weight gain, which would decrease their fertility (and thus profitability)—resulting in constant hunger (Mench 2002). Even in the best case, welfare-certified poultry products are produced in part with lines



of birds who have been so genetically modified that they never experience the simple satisfaction of having their hunger sated.

UNHEALTHY GENETICS AND PANDEMIC RISK

With the risk of global pandemics at the forefront of consumers' minds, the issue of chicken genetics becomes even more pertinent. Research suggests that fast growth comes at the expense of other vital systems, including the immune system. Because the birds' energetic resources are directed entirely toward growth, their immune systems are severely compromised, leaving them more vulnerable to illness (van der Most et al. 2010).²⁰ At any given time there is an unprecedented number of chickens on Earth—roughly three for every human being (Food and Agriculture Organization 2018)—and these chickens have been bred in ways that leave them more likely to succumb to infectious diseases of all kinds (Muir et al. 2008; van der Most et al. 2010). The industry's almost exclusive use of these genetically uniform, immunocompromised birds, paired with their extreme confinement, has led to greater levels of disease and mortality and increased the global risk of pandemic zoonotic diseases such as bird flu (Delany 2003).

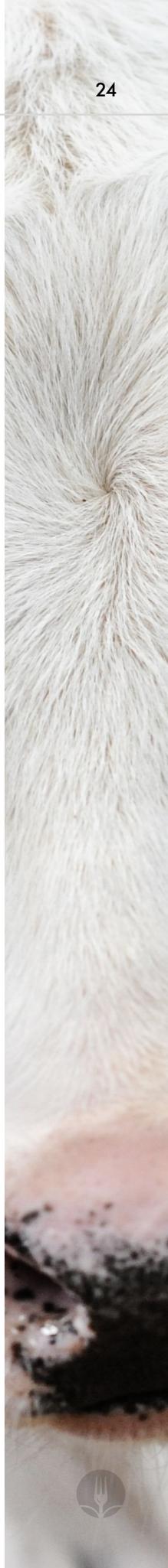
Even if these birds had fully functioning immune systems, monoculture on an enormous scale increases the likelihood of viral mutations that can transform existing viruses into forms which pose pandemic risk. Without meaningful changes to genetic welfare, housing density, and genetic uniformity, there is little reason to believe that compliance with animal welfare certifications reduces pandemic risk. Instead, certifications' reassurances obscure the reality that virtually all birds are still produced using high-tech and

historically unprecedented hybrid breeding techniques widely known to compromise poultry health and increase pandemic risk.

WELFARE ISSUE IV: SEPARATION OF CALVES AND THEIR MOTHERS BEFORE WEANING

Like all mammals, cows only produce milk after giving birth, so cows within the dairy industry are impregnated once a year to keep up their milk production (Hagevoort and Garcia 2013). A crucial element of well-being in cows is the ability of a mother cow and her calf to remain together during their natural weaning period. **This most basic welfare requirement, however, goes unprotected by all welfare certifications.** As intuition would suggest, for all mammals, separating a mother and child is not just one welfare issue among others—it is cruel and likely traumatic. Cows actively resist the removal of their calves, and the suffering caused by their forced separation is both acute and prolonged, with the cow and her calf experiencing measurable distress for days (Daros et al. 2014). The long-term emotional impacts on mother cows having their calves forcibly removed year after year are difficult to quantify, but are likely profound.

Uninterrupted, the weaning period can last between six and nine months, during which time "the cow provides the calf with natural suckling, maternal support and a complex array of stimulations," according to scientists from the Animal Production Research Centre (Kišac et al. 2011, 262). Today's dairy industry, however, typically separates calves from their mothers *shortly after birth*. This has been found to diminish calves' social skills even into adulthood (Wagner et al. 2015), which may be an indication of the enduring effects of their trauma. Female calves are typically raised alone in



isolated calf hutches without any socialization to maximize the amount of their mothers' milk that can be procured for human consumption (University of Wisconsin-Madison 2020). Male calves, on the other hand, are not useful at dairies and are generally immediately sold for veal or beef, or are simply killed on the farm.

According to a recent literature review, consumer awareness of these practices is low: 67 percent were reportedly unaware in one survey (Placzek, Christoph-Schulz, and Barth 2020). However, after being provided information by researchers, 84 percent of people disapproved of early separation (Placzek, Christoph-Schulz, and Barth 2020). Certifications, once again, contribute to this knowledge gap and impede consumers' ability to make informed choices when selecting dairy products. GAP does require a minimum six-month weaning period for beef products; however, as of the writing of this report, GAP has yet to issue dairy standards (Global Animal Partnership 2020e). When it does release them, it is improbable that they will prohibit early separation. CH establishes a minimum weaning period, but it is only five weeks long (Humane Farm Animal Care 2014b). Even AWA falls short of requiring a natural weaning period, recommending that calves are raised in herds alongside their mothers but requiring just six weeks before they are separated (A Greener World 2018a).

WELFARE ISSUE V: CULLING ALL NEWBORN MALE CHICKS

Although today's certifications leave a multitude of welfare issues unresolved, the last this report will highlight in depth implicates the entire U.S. egg industry, including all certified products: the culling of newborn male chicks.

Hundreds of millions of male chicks in the U.S.—and about 6 billion worldwide—are killed annually just after birth, as they are not considered useful to the egg industry (Brice-Saddler 2020; Krautwald-Junghanns et al. 2018). Investigative footage has revealed that chicks may be suffocated to death, sometimes in plastic bags (Mercy For Animals 2011), but they are more commonly ground up alive and conscious in macerators. The AVMA condones maceration as long as chicks are put into the machines at a rate that prevents backlog (Leary et al. 2020), although investigations have documented that these guidelines are often ignored (Mercy For Animals 2014b). Chick maceration has become so controversial that France and Germany have committed to banning male chick culling by the end of 2021 (Linden 2020). Several European companies are developing in-ovo sexing technology to allow male embryos to be sorted out and discarded before hatching (In Ovo 2016), but there has been



no binding commitment by the U.S. egg industry to transition to this technology. The UEP has stated that it will work with its members and business partners “toward the goal of eliminating this practice” but only “as soon as it is commercially viable and economically feasible” (United Egg Producers 2020c). Rather than use their influence to push for technological development and early adoption, welfare certifiers too appear to be waiting for the market to solve the problem. Even the better welfare certifications, CH, GAP, and AWA, do nothing to alert consumers that their welfare-certified eggs come from systems in which all male chicks are killed at hatching.²¹





THE DIRT ON HUMANEWASHING

Conclusion



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Conclusion

This report overviews the extensive growth and scope of humanewashing and demonstrates that animal welfare certifications have increasingly become vectors for consumer deception. It documents egregious humanewashing by what it has classified as “industry certifications.” Significantly, two of these industry certifications—AHC and OHC—are highly effective at obscuring the fact that they function as advertising agencies for CAFOs and present themselves as if driven by social concerns. The report’s most substantial finding, however, is that **humanewashing is the norm with independent certifications.** These certifications are shaped in important ways by animal protection groups but nonetheless are active humanewashers. The anomalous AWA certification demonstrated itself to be in a class by itself, approximating consumer expectations, but even it does not totally avoid the taint of humanewashing. Clearly, if one is to rely on any certification, AWA is the one to rely upon. However, AWA has failed to scale and shows little potential to do so.

Even the most rigorous certifications that have achieved scale, Certified Humane and GAP, don’t meet the basic commonsense threshold for being humane that is well-attested in consumer surveys: requiring animals to be raised on pasture.

In addition to not meeting this consumer demand, they obscure multiple forms of cruelty, including insufficiently exercising and socializing animals, utilizing genetically modified animals prone to disease, separating calves and their mothers before weaning in the dairy industry, and culling all newborn male chicks in the egg industry. While most certifications demonstrate the failure of welfare certification through standards that simply don’t prevent these kinds of cruelty, AWA demonstrates certification’s failure from another direction. AWA’s standards are, while imperfect, the highest in the nation, but almost certainly directly as a result, AWA has little potential to influence the mainstream market. Most consumers have no or almost no access to its products.



While this report has focused on the failures of welfare certifications, an important subsidiary finding is that **the fact that meat, egg, and dairy companies themselves control whether certification marks are placed on their packaging puts tremendous downward pressure on the ability of certifications to improve welfare standards.** This fact is symptomatic of the reality that agribusiness companies have far more resources than do the animal groups attempting to curb their abuses. Even well-meaning certifications face an uneven playing field where industry has the advantage at every turn, in part because government has for the moment sided with big agriculture against consumer interests (a topic requiring more exploration). Until consumers are in a position to compel agribusiness companies to display their welfare grade, whether good or bad, companies will simply continue to embrace the meaningless industry certifications or, equally destructive, hold sincere certification efforts hostage by refusing to display any certification that does not advance their interests.

In closing it is worth noting that this failure of certification puts animal groups like Farm Forward that represent a largely meat-eating constituency in an awkward position. In good faith, there are no animal products that we can easily recommend, an unfortunate situation for nonprofits looked to by consumers to guide them to higher welfare products. If all a consumer wants to know is that their genetically modified, sickly, and lame chicken is confined in a barn instead of cage, certifications can be helpful, **but for the consumer trying to reach even the basic standard of humane treatment that was the norm prior to the rise of CAFOs, certifications obscure more than they reveal.**

Certifications give the illusion that the consumer can easily avoid factory farmed products and basic forms of cruelty like intensive confinement when, in reality, the choice is almost always factory farming.

Most of the time when consumers see a welfare certification, it means the opposite of animal welfare.

Animal groups are under so much pressure to fulfill the consumer demand for humane meat that they are encouraged to support any certification that promises to be better than an egregious deception, even when these certifications clearly obfuscate the degree of cruelty in the food industry. These animal group endorsements may at times help reduce animal suffering, but at the expense of deceiving consumers. Animal groups would do well to find ways to communicate to the public the gravity of the situation and the real lack of animal products that could legitimately be called humane. Without letting the perfect become the enemy of the good, animal groups need to prevent better-run factory farms from becoming the new understanding of "humane." The difficult pill animal protection professionals need to deliver is that the meat, poultry, dairy, and egg industries are thoroughly broken, and those of us who support them perpetuate the problem in ways that certification is not solving and is only occasionally mitigating. There is a straightforward enough path for individuals ready to eschew or dramatically reduce the use of animal



products, but for the person committed to eating animals and to humane treatment—let alone other justice concerns related to factory farming²²—the situation is grim indeed.

This report in no way claims to have all the answers, but Farm Forward believes that honesty, ingenuity, and generational efforts can eliminate CAFOs *if the seriousness and scope of the problem is increasingly well-understood*. We do not need to have answers on how to fix certification to know that pretending certifications are something they are not is a bad idea. We do not need to have all the solutions to know that the way forward will require sobriety and frankness about the problems we currently face, qualities that are receding as certifications grow. At present welfare certifications deceive consumers, arrest the momentum of change, and erode our societal ability to build the will to end factory farming. This is the dirt on humanewashing.



THE DIRT ON HUMANEWASHING

Addendum I

The Loss of Healthy Genetics Through Hybrid Breeding

Animal breeding has changed dramatically over the past 60 years. Until as late as the 1960s, most farmers either bred their own animals or purchased animals from a local farmer who did. These animals, especially poultry, were selected for a balance of traits: growth and efficiency, but also immune health and the ability to forage, thrive outdoors, and mother their young. That changed after World War II with the development of hybrid breeding techniques. Unlike traditional breeding, hybrid breeding involves a complex process of combining many different breeds of birds (crossbreeding), which requires producers to maintain multiple specialty “breeder” lines (Hanke, Skinner, and Flore 1974). These lines of inbred animals carry specific genetic mutations, such as the so-called “obese gene” (Lin, Friars, and Moran 1980) that facilitates weight gain, and are not actually the birds consumers eat. Of these different lines, 10 to 20 are then crossbred in pre-determined sequences to produce the eggs that become the “hybrid” Cornish Cross birds eaten by consumers (Reese 2012), known as “broilers,” who have been so genetically modified that they bear little resemblance to chickens raised before 1960.

By selecting for genetic mutations which are desirable only in the context of CAFOs and other modern production practices, hybrid breeding techniques compromise welfare. For reasons that are not hard to guess, breeding companies have aggressively prioritized traits that directly affect profitability, such as high growth rates and feed conversion ratios. However, this results in a tradeoff: while rapidly accumulating fat and meat muscle tissue, birds’ bodies do not have enough resources to allocate toward developing healthy bones and organs. Thus, breeding for fast growth or high feed conversion also produces birds with weak legs and high mortality (Bessei 2006). Breeding companies work to find the sweet spot, where just enough birds can walk to feeders to eat, even if walking is painful, so they can cheaply convert feed to muscle and fat.

This genetic modification of birds to grow excessively large very quickly has devastating effects on birds’ well-being. For example, some birds have been bred so that they lack the ability to feel sated and thus experience chronic hunger. Although the welfare implications of being chronically hungry are difficult to quantify, other effects are much more evident. By the time they reach slaughter age, broiler chickens are so obese that their legs often



The Hybrid Chicken's Growth Rate



Today's chickens grow so fast that if a human baby's growth was similarly accelerated, he'd weigh over 600lbs by 2 months of age.

 FARM FORWARD

To get a sense of the degree to which chickens have been genetically altered over the last half-century, it helps to examine growth rate. Today's broilers reach their average market weight—which is trending upward but currently about 2.9 kilograms (USDA 2020)—in only 35 to 42 days (five to six weeks). The Cobb500, marketed as the “world’s most efficient broiler,” for instance, grows at an average rate of 75.7 grams per day (Cobb-Vantress 2020). In contrast, 1950s’ birds, now known as heritage breeds, were allowed a 16-week (112-day) growth period before slaughter. The Plymouth Rock, a heritage breed, takes 19 weeks (133 days) to reach a weight of 1.8 to 2.3 kilograms (TSC Stores 2016), giving it a growth rate averaging just 15 grams per day. According to the Livestock Conservancy, the 16-week growth period provided time for birds “to develop strong skeletal structure and healthy organs prior to building muscle mass” (2020).

Figure 6.

cannot support the birds' own weight, and many die prematurely of heart attacks and congenital myopathies (Chen et al. 2017). These chickens are what Vice has called “true Frankenbirds” (Rose 2017).

Based on calculations published in *Poultry Science*, if a human child had their growth accelerated similarly to that of today's hybrid birds, a two-month-old would weigh over 600 pounds, as depicted in Figure 6 (Wideman et al. 2013).

Even so-called “slower-growing” chickens, which have been hailed as a higher welfare alternative to standard broilers, are still



genetically modified hybrid birds who experience forms of cruelty that were hard to imagine before the rise of factory farming. These breeds have had their growth rates accelerated to reach their market weight between 55 and 84 days (with growth rates ranging between 32 and 47 grams per day) instead of the historic minimum of 112 days (Aviagen 2018a, 2018b). All of these commercially available poultry lines involve the use of one or more fast-growth parent lines; these breeding birds have been so modified that their normal satiation mechanism has been damaged. This results in a disturbing situation in which the breeding birds overeat to the point of self-harm in a futile attempt to experience satiation (Mench 2002; Morrissey et al. 2014). Thus, even the higher welfare poultry strains that have less aggressive growth rates still depend upon the use of lines of birds who suffer one of the greatest cruelties in all of industrial farming: a life of constant hunger with no hope of satiation.

Industry has repeatedly held out the promise that welfare can be achieved without giving up the rapid growth rates that are at present a defining feature of the whole of the poultry industry, including its peculiarly named “slower-growing” lines of birds (which, in fact, are growth-accelerated, but less so than the typical Cornish Cross). That is, industry has argued that, with time, they can maintain rapid growth rates but ultimately find a way to produce healthy birds. There is no evidence to support this wishful thinking and abundant evidence that growth acceleration will, on balance, always correlate with other compromises for animal health. Basic physiology suggests that the “resources available to an individual are finite” (Siegel, Honaker, and Rauw 2008, 230). If more bodily resources are assigned to one function, like growth

rate or laying rate, this will inherently mean that there are “fewer resources available for other processes” (Siegel, Honaker, and Rauw 2008, 230). Indeed, many of the tradeoffs between rapid growth; heart, lung, and bone health; and immune function are now well-documented (Rauw 2012; Grandin and Deesing 1998; Julian 1993).

Despite this, welfare certifications—with the exception of AWA, which at least recommends heritage breeds—portray the sickly genetic lines they are certifying as normal or even as high welfare. Bad has become normal.



THE DIRT ON HUMANEWASHING

Addendum II

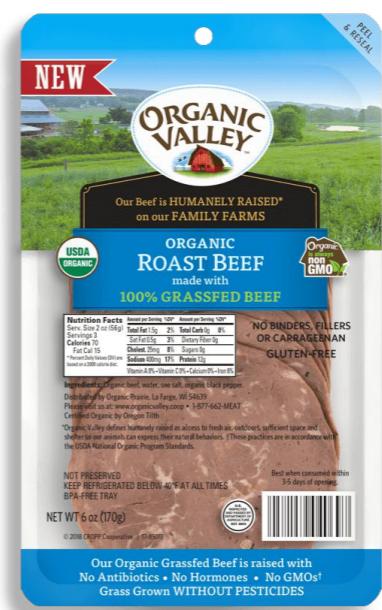
Deceptive Label Claims

Claims like “humanely raised” and “all natural” are now widespread and are often reinforced by accompanying images (see Figure 7).

Such claims function primarily to deceive consumers about the true nature of the products they adorn. In one survey, the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) found that most shoppers believed erroneously that the term “free range” (which has no legal definition for pork, beef, or dairy, and is only

loosely defined for birds) meant that animals were raised outdoors on pasture (2016). Consumer Reports found that 65 percent of consumers believe incorrectly that the meaningless phrase “humanely raised” indicated outdoor access, while 77 percent thought it indicated adequate space (Consumer Reports National Research Center 2014). Such examples could be multiplied.²³ Figure 8 outlines some of the most common welfare claims alongside their actual meaning for animals.

Figure 7. Humanewashing claims: “all natural” chicken, “free range” eggs, “humanely raised” beef





Common “Humane” and “Healthy” Claims and What They Mean for Animals

NATURAL

Nothing. This term only refers to post-slaughter ingredients and additives.

HUMANELY RAISED

An unregulated term that does not ensure higher welfare standards.

ORGANIC

The USDA’s National Organic Program does have specific standards that must be met for certification; however, the welfare components are weak. Animals should be given enough space to accommodate natural behaviors and provided outdoor access, but space requirements are not clearly spelled out, and animals generally have only slightly more room than on conventional farms. Animals cannot be given hormones or unnecessary antibiotics and must be fed an organic diet.

HORMONE-FREE

No hormones given to dairy cows, but no requirements for welfare. No meaning for chicken, eggs, or pork, as hormones are already prohibited in these industries.

CAGE-FREE

This term applies to virtually all chickens used for meat, who are raised indoors on factory farms, as cages are not used by the broiler industry. For egg-laying hens, cages are replaced with crowded indoor aviaries. No outdoor access is required.

FREE-RANGE

Birds must be given access to the outdoors, but actual outside time varies widely. Many birds on crowded farms may never use the small outdoor opening provided. This claim gives consumers no assurance that animals actually go outside.

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At least one industry group has also developed a more sophisticated marketing label that attempts to garner consumer trust by mimicking actual certifications. In 2017, the largest trade association for the chicken industry, the National Chicken Council (NCC), rolled out the “Chicken Guarantees,” a set of industry-wide standards meant to assure consumers that meat chickens raised in the U.S. are not confined to cages and have not been given steroids or hormones. While likely true, these claims are deceptive: cages are not used to raise chickens for meat in the U.S., and federal law prohibits administering steroids or hormones to chickens raised for meat (National Chicken Council 2017). The Chicken Guarantees add a bold check-mark to meat packaging offering consumers a false sense that standard practices have been certified as humane, akin to a hypothetical paint company stamping a “verified lead-free” label on its cans to paint them as somehow cleaner and greener, despite lead having been banned in paints since the 1970s.

Figure 8.

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Endnotes

- ⁰¹ For further details on Farm Forward's departure from GAP, see Gross, A. "Why We Resigned from the Board of the Nation's Largest Animal Welfare Certification." Farm Forward (blog). October 2, 2020. <https://www.farmforward.com/#!/blog?blogid=why-we-resigned-from-the-board-of-the-nations-largest-animal-welfare-certification&site=farm-forward>.
- ⁰² NOP differs from other independent certifications in that it is administered by the USDA, a government agency. Consumers have embraced the organic label, believing it to be not only healthier, but also more humane: for example, a 2014 ASPCA survey found that most buyers of organic products assume the organic label indicates humane treatment, with 68 percent believing producers were required to raise animals on pasture (2016). The reality is that the NOP's welfare standards are weak: animals are supposed to be given sufficient space to accommodate natural behaviors and provided some access to the outdoors, but minimums are not clearly defined. Consequently, organic farms often are or resemble CAFOs. A new regulatory rule that would have strengthened these standards was withdrawn by the USDA in 2018 after the agency claimed it did not have the statutory authority to issue it (USDA National Organic Program 2017).
- ⁰³ Also see a University of Nebraska survey which reports that 70 percent of rural residents agreed that "animal welfare" means more than providing adequate food, water, and shelter; it includes other crucial contributors to well-being such as adequate space, exercise, and socialization (University of Nebraska-Lincoln 2011).
- ⁰⁴ Data is limited but sufficient to conclude that the concern people express corresponds with some degree of willingness to pay a premium. Price premiums for "free range" products, for example, can reach up to 87 percent (Chang, Lusk, and Norwood 2010). The longstanding premium for "natural" meat is another example (Abrams, Meyers, and Irani 2010). Also see the results of an ASPCA survey (2016).
- ⁰⁵ A 2018 survey found that 60 percent of consumers felt it was important for food to be produced sustainably (Food Insight 2018), and a 2014 survey found that consumers were willing to pay a premium of, on average, about 15 percent for beef labeled sustainable (White and Brady 2014). A Consumer Reports survey also found that at least half of shoppers were aware that the overuse of antibiotics in industrial animal farming contributes to the problem of microbial resistance, and 86 percent felt that meat companies should have to disclose their antibiotic usage (Consumer Reports Survey Group 2018). Today, the global COVID-19 pandemic has opened consumers'



eyes further to the potential public health risk posed by zoonotic pathogens emerging from wild animal markets and CAFOs (Mercy For Animals Research Group 2020).

⁰⁶ Percentage of confinement farms was calculated by Farm Forward on the basis of USDA data (2014).

⁰⁷ Consumer Reports found that 86 percent of consumers wanted meat from animals raised without antibiotics to be available, and 60 percent were willing to pay more for such products (Consumer Reports 2012). A more recent survey conducted by Oklahoma State University revealed that a staggering 98 percent of consumers believed erroneously that hormones are used in pork and broiler chicken production, and found that respondents were willing to pay a premium of between 1 and 2 dollars for products labeled superfluously with “no added hormones” (Lusk 2016).

⁰⁸ Thus far, OHC has only certified chicken, which may comply with the meager guidelines of the NCC. The guidelines merely suggest that birds have a minimum of 0.8 square feet of space per bird—which is only slightly larger than a standard sheet of printer paper. Like the egg industry’s standards, NCC standards fail to require basic provisions to improve welfare, such as perches or outdoor access (National Chicken Council 2020), and they do not address the practice of breeding birds to suffer from major health problems as a result of their accelerated growth (European Commission 2000). As a trade association, the NCC offers guidelines that defend

and codify the practices of its largest growers, including Tyson, Sanderson, and Pilgrim’s Pride.

⁰⁹ Although this issue applies across several species, this report focuses on the extreme and well-researched example of genetic modification in chickens raised for meat.

¹⁰ This issue exists for cows in both the meat and dairy industries. While GAP addresses the issue for beef, it does not have dairy standards, and no other certification resolves the issue within dairy standards.

¹¹ Culling of newborn male chicks occurs throughout the egg industry, and no certification’s egg industry standards eliminate the practice.

¹² Most consumers would need to know more about how animals are raised, and about the social and emotional lives of animals, to be able to form their own opinion about the current treatment of farmed animals; even with extensive polling, it is hard to know what the results would mean given the current level of consumer understanding.

¹³ As mentioned previously, a survey found that 79 percent of American consumers expect humane labels to mean that animals are raised on pasture, while at least 65 percent believe that a mere “humanely raised” label, let alone an independent certification, ensures this (Consumer Reports National Research Center 2014). Additionally, in a recent study, nearly 70 percent of



consumers stated that they were willing to pay a premium on products certified by a “trustworthy welfare certification” (Spain et al. 2018). While it is difficult to translate self-reported behavior into reality, the success and growth of certifications like GAP and CH show that consumers are indeed accepting these premiums by the millions.

¹⁴ In the recent Guelph study, the results clearly indicated that faster growth is associated with lower welfare in a number of registers, including mobility, foot and hock health, organ development, activity level, and muscle health (Torrey, Kiarie, and Widowski 2020).

¹⁵ The weight gain of 40 grams per day assumes birds are “allowed to grow naturally on an optimum ration” (A Greener World 2018b).

¹⁶ AWA-certified cheese and butter brand, Truly Grass Fed, is a partial exception to this rule and is theoretically available at major U.S. supermarkets. However, an attempt to locate AWA-certified products at mainstream retail chains by inputting 10 randomly generated U.S. zip codes (60172 in Roselle, IL; 75604 in Longview, TX; 28803 in Asheville, NC; 50010 in Ames, IA; 32937 in Satellite Beach, FL; 11530 in Garden City, NY; 20705 in Beltsville, MD; 23451 in Virginia Beach, VA; 49503 in Grand Rapids, MI; and 17036 in Hummelstown, PA) into AGW’s product locator returned only specialty, niche, and local markets, as well as Whole Foods, within a 25-mile radius of all tested zip codes (A Greener World 2020c).

¹⁷ Even more worrisome, Farm Forward staff have found GAP-certified beef, pork, and turkey products in multiple states absent Step numbers anywhere on the package. Products were surveyed by Farm Forward staff at Whole Foods locations in San Diego, CA; Fairfax, VA; Salt Lake City, UT; and Chicago, IL, between July and August 2020. For more information on Whole Foods’ relationship with GAP, see Gross, A. “Why We Resigned from the Board of the Nation’s Largest Animal Welfare Certification.” Farm Forward (blog). October 2, 2020. <https://www.farmforward.com/#!/blog?blogid=why-we-resigned-from-the-board-of-the-nations-largest-animal-welfare-certification&site=farm-forward>.

¹⁸ When the addition of a generic label—something GAP had originally rejected—was proposed to the GAP board, it was explained that the generic label was essential because producers were refusing to put a GAP label on their products most of the time, despite having passed a GAP audit. It was, of course, only producers with low-tiered products that were refusing, and it was these low-tier producers who demanded the generic label. The change was entirely driven by industry and resisted, unsuccessfully, by the members of GAP’s board representing animal groups.

¹⁹ This paper uses a chick birth weight of 40 grams in growth rate calculations when this data point is unavailable. Actual results, therefore, may vary slightly.



²⁰ Despite van der Most et al.'s research demonstrating that the "lines selected for increased growth all showed a strong and significant decrease in immune function," and concluding that "selection for growth does indeed compromise immune function," the article strangely suggests that it might somehow be possible to achieve both rapid growth and immune function (2010, 74). The implication appears to be that breeding with a focus on immune health does not necessarily decrease growth, so one could select the faster-growing lines of birds that have already been selected for strong immunity; it is highly doubtful, however, that this kind of growth selection would achieve the rapid rates of growth the poultry industry currently insists upon. Thus, the data in this article more properly indicates that while growth and immunity need not be opposed in every case, focusing on rapid growth will always lead to welfare problems, like poor immunity.

²¹ Because U.S. egg producers obfuscate the universal use of chick culling within breeding operations, few consumers are aware of the practice. However, a recent study in Germany, where in-ovo sexing is now being implemented, revealed widespread approval of the technology as an alternative to male chick culling (Reithmayer, Mußhoff, and Danne 2019).

²² Significantly, while the structure of the nonprofit landscape means that groups like Farm Forward tend to address either animal protection or ecological concerns

or worker justice, most want to see all of these problems addressed (we certainly do). This is an additional important reason not to accept the tiny improvements offered by welfare certifications and to call out their humanewashing. When animal welfare is robustly addressed, it requires the end of factory farming as we know it, and the benefits of the end of factory farming go way beyond animal welfare. This puts animal welfare efforts in alliance with ecological and social justice concerns. Animal protection efforts are not automatically aligned with other concerns in food justice, but they can be. When animal groups make promoting better factory farmed products through certification the vehicle of addressing animal suffering, they entrench factory farming even if minimal suffering reduction is achieved, betraying the larger cause of creating a just agricultural system. Incremental improvements are only improvements if they build momentum towards real transformation.

²³ In yet another poll, only 2 percent of Americans could correctly identify the definition of a "natural" meat label (Harris Interactive QuickQuery 2009), which deals only with post-slaughter additives and in no way indicates how animals are raised and handled (USDA 2016). Most believed instead that these products come from animals raised without hormones or antibiotics. Between 70 and 80 percent of consumers also believe that the "natural" label should mean that no hormones, pesticides, or genetically modified organisms were used to produce the product (Consumer Reports Survey Group 2018).

