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Salmonella Sold at a Premium: The "Better Meat" Behind Whole Foods 365-Brand Chicken



Photo: Jo-Anne McArthur / Animal Equality / We Animals

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Executive Summary

Whole Foods Market built its 365 chicken brand on a commitment to "better meat" standards, promising transparency, traceability, animal welfare, no antibiotics ever, and no added growth hormones. Customers pay a premium for that promise, and implicit in it is an assumption most wouldn't think to question: that it's a safer product, and not a product that may carry high rates of the most dangerous forms of salmonella.

Farm Forward's latest investigation traced 247 365-brand raw chicken products to their processing plants using federal establishment numbers. It found that 98.4 percent of the 365-brand raw chicken we sampled was processed in plants where high-virulence salmonella serotypes—the strains most associated with severe illness, hospitalization, and death—make up the majority of positive samples found at the plants, including at plants the federal government considers to be performing acceptably. Most of this contaminated chicken traces back to a single company: the vast majority (92.3 percent) of the 365-brand products in our sample were processed at plants owned by Perdue. Because Perdue also supplies many of the largest supermarkets in America, we were able to compare prices of 365-brand chicken with Perdue's products sold elsewhere. Whole Foods charged a premium of as much as nearly 46 percent, averaging roughly 20 percent, above mainstream retailers for the identical product type and production claim (organic to organic, conventional to conventional) of Perdue chicken from the same processing plants.

Two of the four highest-risk plants in the United States are supplying chicken to Whole Foods' "better meat" brand.

This investigation was designed to evaluate whether Whole Foods' quality claims hold up, based on data from processing plants. We traced each product to its specific processing plant using its USDA establishment number. We then cross-referenced those establishments against two USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) datasets: the agency's salmonella contamination ratings, and its surveillance data on salmonella serotypes and antibiotic resistance.

Given Perdue's dominance in our sample, we conducted a second audit: identifying which of those same plants supply chicken sold at mainstream retailers in the same markets as the Whole Foods stores we surveyed, and comparing prices for what is frequently the same underlying product, sourced from the identical plant, matched by production claim (organic versus conventional), and typically the same conventional fast-growing breeds of chicken.

The findings from this research are stark:

- **More than 1 in 4 Whole Foods 365-brand chicken products came from highly contaminated plants**, and that risk is concentrated in Whole Foods' California and Central West sales regions**.** Three of the six slaughter plants confirmed to supply 365-brand chicken in our sample—accounting for more than a quarter (27.1 percent) of the 365-brand chicken we sampled—failed FSIS's performance standard for contamination over the last year (a rolling 52-week period, July 27, 2025 through July 25, 2026).

- **The most dangerous strains of salmonella dominate contamination at these plants.** Every one of the six FSIS-rated plants supplying 365-brand chicken showed high-virulence salmonella, such as *Salmonella Infantis, Salmonella Enteritidis,* and *Salmonella Typhimurium*—the strains most associated with severe human illness, hospitalization, and death—as the majority of its positive samples, ranging from 77.8 percent at the lowest to 100 percent at two of the six.

- **High rates of antibiotic-resistant and multidrug-resistant strains were found at all of these plants**, including those with the best contamination ratings—with at least 64.9 percent of positive samples showing antibiotic resistance, and at least a quarter multidrug-resistant, at every single plant we sampled—a profile that complicates treatment for salmonella infections serious enough to require antibiotic therapy.

- **Whole Foods' 365-brand chicken is, in most cases, Perdue chicken.** The vast majority of 365-brand raw chicken in our sample was processed in Perdue plants (92.3 percent), often the same plants that supply chicken sold at mainstream retailers like Walmart and Kroger.

- **Consumers are paying premium prices for chicken from plants with dangerous salmonella contamination.** Whole Foods charged up to 45.7 percent (averaging 19.6 percent) more for this chicken than retailers like Walmart—for the identical product type and production claim (organic to organic, conventional to conventional)—despite its coming from the plants that rank among the worst in the country for high-virulence serotypes and antibiotic resistance.

These findings undercut the basic premise of the 365 brand. Whole Foods consumers are charged significantly more for chicken marketed as meeting a "better meat" standard. However, on the specific measures that determine actual food-safety risk for salmonella (contamination, serotype virulence, and antibiotic resistance), much of that chicken is indistinguishable from chicken sold at a lower price by other retailers. It is also likely chicken from the same conventional fast-growing breeds sold industry-wide, and the same ones Whole Foods pledged a decade ago to phase out (a related failure examined in a companion Farm Forward report, "The Root of the Problem: How Whole Foods Abandoned Its Promise on Chicken Genetics").[1] Whole Foods shoppers are not just failing to get what they're paying for; in many cases, they're paying more for the same types of products, from the same plants, with the same production claim, and typically the same breeds, sourced from some of the most contaminated plants in the country.

1 "The Root of the Problem: How Whole Foods Abandoned Its Promise on Chicken Genetics," Farm Forward, October 2026.

Introduction

Whole Foods makes bold promises about what makes its meat different from other retailers: "Traceability and animal welfare. No antibiotics, ever, and no added growth hormones. Because better meat is our commitment to you."[2] For a Whole Foods customer, that language is meant to act as an assurance that higher welfare standards are being met, and it implies a safer product than what's available at other retailers.

Farm Forward's latest investigation found that *better meat* does not hold up under scrutiny. Much of Whole Foods' own 365-brand raw chicken is processed at plants where a significant share of samples test positive for salmonella, including some of the same plants, owned by Perdue, that supply chicken to Walmart, Kroger, Target, and other mainstream retailers. Among the plants supplying 365-brand chicken are those contaminated well beyond USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service's (FSIS) allowable maximum percentages of contamination, and the contamination is concentrated in high-virulence serotypes—strains most associated with severe illness, hospitalization, and death, including *Salmonella Infantis*, *Salmonella Enteritidis*, and *Salmonella Typhimurium*. Compounding this risk, a significant share of positive salmonella samples from these plants show resistance to antibiotics, including those the World Health Organization (WHO) classifies as highly important to human medicine—a reality that means if someone is sickened by one of these strains and requires antibiotics to treat the infection, those drugs simply may not work.

In other words, on the specific measures that determine actual food-safety risk (contamination rates, serotype virulence, and antibiotic resistance), 365-brand chicken is often indistinguishable from chicken carrying no such "better meat" claims at all. And consumers are paying a steep premium for the difference, up to 45.7 percent (averaging 19.6 percent) more than mainstream retailers selling the same organic or conventional product type from the same plants.

Salmonellosis is one of the most significant foodborne illnesses in the United States, infecting 1.28 million people and leading to 12,500 hospitalizations annually.[3] Salmonella is also the leading cause of death from foodborne illness, resulting in 238 deaths each year.[4] The actual salmonella burden is likely much worse: the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that only 1 in 30 cases is diagnosed.[5] Poultry is one of the most common sources of salmonella infection, accounting for roughly 25 percent of all confirmed cases.[6] But not all salmonella is created equal. Some serotypes cause more serious illness, and a growing share of salmonella carries resistance to an increasing number of antibiotics used to treat serious illness.

2 "Meat Department Quality Standards," Whole Foods Market, accessed August 11, 2026. Note: We also include the link to this page captured on the Wayback Machine Internet Archive in the event that Whole Foods removes or edits this page at a later date.

3 "Estimates: Burden of Foodborne Illness in the United States," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), March 19, 2025.

4 "Estimates: Burden of Foodborne Illness in the United States," CDC.

5 "About Salmonella Infection," CDC, October 4, 2024.

6 "Exploring Practical Strategies To Reduce Salmonella in Poultry Products," USDA FSIS, December 2, 2025.

Antibiotic resistance may seem like an abstract issue, but the WHO and the CDC both name antibiotic resistance as one of the most serious global threats to public health.[7] When bacteria become resistant to antibiotics commonly used to treat human illness, the treatment options for those infections become limited. The WHO warns that we may be entering a post-antibiotic era, where many common injuries and illnesses that have been easily treated since the advent of antibiotics—a scraped knee, strep throat, a urinary tract infection—again become potentially life-threatening.[8] When resistance genes are allowed to circulate in salmonella in a poultry plant, that resistance can transfer to other strains of salmonella, as well as to other kinds of bacteria, well beyond the poultry industry.[9] WHO surveillance data published in 2025 found that, in 2023, 1 in 6 common bacterial infections was resistant to antibiotic treatments, meaning that this is not a distant or hypothetical threat; it's actively affecting millions of people worldwide.[10] For a full account of how serotype and antibiotic resistance affect salmonella risk in the poultry industry, see Farm Forward's in-depth report, "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat."[11]

To evaluate Whole Foods' claims of "better meat" against this reality, during the week of August 3, 2026, Farm Forward audited 365-brand raw chicken at 30 stores across the country (five stores in each of Whole Foods' six U.S. sales regions, spanning urban, suburban, and small-city locations in 25 states, including Washington D.C.).[12] We photographed every distinct 365-brand raw chicken product type available at each store and identified the processing plant for 247 of them using its USDA establishment number printed on the package. We then cross-referenced that number against two FSIS datasets: the agency's salmonella performance standards that classify plants according to their level of contamination,[13] and its raw poultry sampling surveillance data, which documents serotypes and antibiotic resistance.[14] Because so many of these contaminated plants turned out to be Perdue-owned, we conducted a second audit of mainstream retailers in the 19 markets where Perdue products were available, letting us price the same chicken at both. Full sampling parameters, exclusion criteria, and a supplementary online-order check are detailed in Appendix G "Methodology." What we found undermines Whole Foods' promise to its customers.

7 "Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States 2019," CDC, 2019; "Antimicrobial Resistance: Key Facts," World Health Organization (WHO), 2021.

8 "Global Antibiotic Resistance Surveillance Report 2025," WHO, October 13, 2025; Steve W. Kerrigan, "What a 'Post-antibiotic Era' Could Mean for Modern Medicine," *The Conversation*, April 23, 2026.

9 "Stop Using Antibiotics in Healthy Animals to Prevent the Spread of Antibiotic Resistance," WHO, November 7, 2017; C. Xu et al., "A Review of Current Bacterial Resistance to Antibiotics in Food Animals," Frontiers in Microbiology 13 (2022): 822689.

10 "WHO Warns of Widespread Resistance to Common Antibiotics Worldwide," WHO, October 13, 2025.

11 "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward, August 2026.

12 Whole Foods' six sales regions are: California (California and Hawaii), Central West (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming), North East (Connecticut, Eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Northern Virginia, and Washington D.C.), Mid West (Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin), North Atlantic (Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island), and South East (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Southern Virginia).

13 "Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting," USDA FSIS, accessed September 14, 2026.

14 "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026.

365-Brand Chicken Is Coming from Plants Highly Contaminated with Dangerous, Antibiotic-Resistant Salmonella

To evaluate whether Whole Foods' "better meat" promise holds up, we traced each 365-brand product in our sample to its processing plant using the USDA establishment number printed on the package. Figure 1 shows the full list of plants supplying 365-brand chicken and the share of our sample each accounted for.

Figure 1. Processing Plants Supplying Whole Foods' 365-Brand Chicken Products

Company	Establishment Number	Location	% of 365-Brand Chicken Products Sampled
Perdue	P1318	Milford, DE	38.9%
Perdue	P19112	Cromwell, KY	27.1%
Perdue	P2178	Georgetown, DE	13.8%
Perdue	P6058	Mount Vernon, WA	12.6%
White Lake Foods	P48281	Ferndale, NY	5.3%
Hudson Valley Foie Gras (packing/further processing only)	P8757	Ferndale, NY	1.6%
Pitman Farms	P27389	Sanger, CA	0.8%

Note: Percentages reflect the share of the 247 365-brand products with an identifiable establishment number. Percentages are rounded independently and may not sum to exactly 100.0%.

Three plants—Perdue's plants in Milford, DE (P1318), Cromwell, KY (P19112), and Georgetown, DE (P2178)—account for roughly 80 percent of 365-brand chicken we sampled. These are the plants where the birds were slaughtered and processed, not necessarily anywhere close to where the resulting chicken is sold. Chicken travels nationally once it leaves the plant, so a shopper's own state offers no protection based on distance. What actually determines a shopper's risk is which of these specific plants supplies their particular Whole Foods store and, as detailed below, that risk is dramatically uneven across the country.

Our analysis goes a step further to identify the nature of the contamination in the plants supplying Whole Foods. First, we used USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) salmonella performance data to look at the level of contamination at each plant.[15] FSIS rates plants each month based on their level of contamination, and this is the information most accessible to consumers savvy enough to look up the plant number on a package of chicken. But the contamination rate at a plant can be dangerously misleading. It says nothing about which kind of salmonella is present (i.e., is it one of the strains most likely to cause human illness?) or whether that salmonella is resistant to antibiotics important to human medicine (i.e., how difficult is the infection to treat?). In short, it does not communicate the full scope of risk posed to consumers by contaminated chicken. FSIS collects all of these data,[16] but it does not take into account serotype or antibiotic resistance in its plant ratings for salmonella.

Farm Forward's earlier report on FSIS serotype and antibiotic resistance data, "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," identified that, although overall contamination in the poultry industry has actually gone down, the salmonella that remains is increasingly concentrated in the most dangerous and difficult-to-treat high-virulence strains.[17] All serotype, virulence, antibiotic-resistance, and multidrug-resistance figures cited in this section are drawn from that report's underlying FSIS dataset analysis. Here, we cross-referenced those data against two sources: FSIS's own category ratings for each plant, and, drawing on our earlier report's analysis of FSIS raw poultry sampling data, the specific serotypes found at these plants and their rates of antibiotic and multidrug resistance. Our findings reflect high rates of contamination in some plants, and high rates of high-virulence serotypes and antibiotic and multidrug resistance in all of the plants supplying Whole Foods, meaning that the nature of that salmonella poses significant risk to consumers no matter how a plant scores on contamination alone.

First, the Plants Are Contaminated

Twenty-five of the 30 Whole Foods stores in our sample (83 percent) carried 365-brand chicken from a plant that failed FSIS's salmonella performance standard. This is what a shopper would encounter in most Whole Foods stores in our audit, not an isolated exception.

FSIS tests for salmonella at poultry plants in the U.S. and applies a Category 1 through 3 rating using performance standards the agency sets around maximum allowable percentages of contamination, and these percentages are distinct for each product type (whole chickens, chicken parts, and comminuted/ground chicken).[18] Category 3 is the worst rating and signals that the plant failed the FSIS performance standard, allowing an unacceptable level of contamination in its products. Figure 2 shows the category ratings for each of the six FSIS-rated slaughter plants supplying Whole Foods 365-brand chicken. (A seventh facility in our sample, Hudson Valley Foie Gras, is a packing facility rather than a slaughter plant, and carries no FSIS category rating—see Figure 2's final row.)

15 "Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting," USDA FSIS, accessed September 14, 2026.

16 "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026.

17 "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward, August 2026.

18 "Performance Standards Salmonella Verification Program for Raw Poultry Products," USDA FSIS, March 2, 2021.

Figure 2. Salmonella Performance of Plants Supplying Whole Foods' 365-Brand Chicken (July 27, 2025 through July 25, 2026)

Company	Establishment Number	Plant Category (Worst Class)*	Fails Standard?**	Contamination Note
Perdue	P2178	Category 3	Yes	>1 in 5 samples positive in 2025
Pitman Farms	P27389	Category 3	Yes	>1 in 5 samples positive in 2025
Perdue	P6058	Category 3	Yes	~1 in 8 samples positive in 2025
Perdue	P1318	Category 2	No	Meets standard
White Lake Foods	P48281	Category 2	No	Meets standard
Perdue	P19112	Category 1	No	Best-performing plant for contamination in the sample
Hudson Valley Foie Gras	P8757	Not rated	N/A	Not a slaughter facility

Source for category ratings: "Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting," USDA FSIS, July 27, 2025 through July 25, 2026, accessed September 1, 2026. Source for percent contamination: "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026; "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

* FSIS assigns salmonella performance categories separately for three product classes: young chicken carcasses, raw chicken parts, and comminuted chicken. A plant may hold a different category in each. Following the convention that a plant's record should be judged by its weakest performance, we report the worst of a plant's three class ratings. The class in which each failing plant was rated Category 3 was: comminuted chicken for P2178 and P27389, and young chicken carcasses for P6058. Full per-class ratings for all plants in our sample are available in the FSIS "Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting" database.

**FSIS sets maximum allowable percentages for positive salmonella samples at each plant by product type: 9.8 percent for broiler carcasses (whole birds), 15.4 percent for chicken parts (e.g., breasts, thighs), and 25 percent for comminuted (ground, minced) chicken. Plants that exceed these percentages for positive tests for each product type fail the standard. Source: "Performance Standards Salmonella Verification Program for Raw Poultry Products," USDA FSIS, March 2, 2021.

Three plants supplying 365-brand chicken failed the standard 100 percent of the time over the last year (July 27, 2025 through July 25, 2026):

- Perdue's plant in Georgetown, DE (P2178) accounted for 13.8 percent of 365-brand products in our sample, ranked #3 for highest contamination in the industry in 2025, and appeared in the top 25 most contaminated plants in 9 of 12 years going back to 2014;[19]
- Pitman Farms' plant in Sanger, CA (P27389) accounted for 0.8 percent of 365-brand products in our sample, ranked #2 in the nation in 2025, and also appeared in the top 25 most contaminated plants in 9 of 12 years;[20]
- Perdue's plant in Mount Vernon, WA (P6058) accounted for 12.6 percent of our sample, though it has not appeared among the nation's most contaminated plants.

Perdue's P2178 and Pitman's P27389 each showed more than 1 in 5 samples testing positive for salmonella in 2025, compared with roughly 1 in 8 samples at Perdue's Mount Vernon, WA plant (P6058). The reality is that two of the worst three plants in the country for salmonella contamination are supplying chicken to Whole Foods' "better meat" brand. Combined, these three Category 3 plants—Perdue's Georgetown, DE plant (P2178), Perdue's Mount Vernon, WA plant (P6058), and Pitman's Sanger, CA plant (P27389)—account for 27.1 percent of 365-brand chicken in our sample (see Figure 1), meaning that more than a quarter of Whole Foods 365-brand chicken is coming from plants that consistently failed the FSIS salmonella standard over the last year.[21] Going back three years (to July 2023) in FSIS salmonella verification testing, P2178 and P27389 failed the standard 94.6 percent of the time, and P6058 failed 51.4 percent of the time.[22] (Note: although White Lake's P48281 has passed the standard in the last five months of FSIS testing data, the plant has failed the standard 75 percent of the time going back to its earliest available category ratings in December 2023.)[23]

19 "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026; "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

20 "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

21 "Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting," USDA FSIS, July 27, 2025 through July 25, 2026, accessed September 1, 2026.

22 "Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting," USDA FSIS, all monthly postings from July 31, 2022-July 29, 2023 through July 27, 2025-July 25, 2026, accessed September 1, 2026. P2178 and P27389 failed the standard in 35 of 37 (94.6 percent of) monthly postings and P6058 failed in 19 of 37 (51.4 percent of) postings.

23 "Salmonella Verification Testing Program Monthly Posting," USDA FSIS, all monthly postings from January 1, 2023-December 30, 2023 through July 27, 2025-July 25, 2026, accessed September 1, 2026. P48281 failed the standard in 24 of 32 (75 percent of) monthly postings. Note: FSIS category ratings were reported as NA for the months prior to this one in the three-year window we analyzed.

A Whole Foods shopper who purchases 365-brand ground chicken is almost certain to be buying from a plant that fails the federal standard for ground chicken. Of the 39 ground chicken products in our sample, 34 (87.2 percent) came from a plant rated Category 3 in the comminuted class—33 of them from Perdue's Georgetown, DE plant (P2178) alone. Not every store carried ground chicken, but every one of the 24 that did sourced it from a failing plant.

Every one of the 24 stores in our audit that carried 365-brand ground chicken sourced it from a failing plant.

This risk is not spread evenly across the country. The California and Central West sales regions stand out sharply. In our sample, 78.1 percent of products in the California region and 61.8 percent in Central West came from a plant carrying a Category 3 rating in at least one product class, compared to less than 14 percent everywhere else we audited. Measured more narrowly (counting only packages whose own product class carried the failing rating), the figures are 25.0 percent in California and 26.5 percent in Central West, against 6.7 to 12.5 percent in the other four regions. The gap narrows on the stricter measure but doesn't close; these two regions carry roughly twice the failing-plant exposure of the rest of the country. This concentration is driven primarily by Perdue's Georgetown, DE plant (P2178), which accounted for 14 of the 17 failing-class products we recorded across those two regions.

Perdue's Mount Vernon, WA plant (P6058) supplies a large share of 365-brand chicken in both regions (30 of its 31 products in our sample were sold there), but its Category 3 rating applies to whole birds, and 28 of those 31 products were chicken parts, a class in which FSIS rates P6058 Category 1. The rating captures only how often the plant's chicken tests positive, not what is found when it does. On that second question, examined in the two sections that follow, P6058 is among the most concerning plants in our sample.

Perdue's Georgetown, DE plant (P2178) has drawn outside scrutiny in the past. This plant appears in the reporting on one of the most serious salmonella outbreaks of the past decade. In 2018, a multidrug-resistant strain of *Salmonella Infantis* sickened 129 people across 32 states and killed one; CDC closed the investigation in 2019 without identifying a single supplier, noting that the strain "appears to be widespread in the chicken industry."[24] A 2021 ProPublica investigation traced that strain's spread through the food supply and found it in samples taken at dozens of poultry plants, including Perdue's P2178 facility.[25]

This same P2178 plant alone accounts for 13.8 percent of the 365-brand products in our sample, and nearly all of that share holds up under the stricter test: 33 of its 34 products were ground chicken, the class in which the plant fails. Roughly 1 in 7 of the 365-brand products we recorded came from a Perdue plant ranked among the most contaminated in the country, and in the ground chicken case, closer to 6 in 7. P2178 also turned up in every region and in 25 of 30 locations, meaning that this risk isn't confined

24 "2018 Salmonella Infections Linked to Raw Chicken Products," Final Update, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 21, 2019. Note: CDC's live page for this outbreak has been retired; we cite the archived version.

25 Bernice Yeung et al., "America's Food Safety System Failed to Stop a Salmonella Epidemic. It's Still Making People Sick," ProPublica, October 29, 2021.

to one part of the country. Shoppers in Providence, RI, and Atlanta, GA, encountered P2178 chicken at higher rates (18.8 percent and 22.2 percent of products) than shoppers in Los Angeles (14.3 percent). The risk documented in this report, in other words, is concentrated in certain plants rather than universal, but it is concentrated in plants supplying a meaningful share of 365-brand chicken nationwide.

These plants' records don't represent one-off lapses in salmonella control. The consistency of failing the salmonella standards indicates chronic, persistent contamination that the companies are failing to address. It's important to point out, regarding contamination, that Perdue also supplies Whole Foods with chicken from significantly less contaminated plants. Perdue's plant in Milford, DE (P1318), and its plant in Cromwell, KY (P19112), have both shown consistently lower contamination and passed the salmonella performance standard, which means that the company *can* achieve lower contamination rates at its plants, yet it allows some of its plants to remain highly contaminated. It is also well within Whole Foods' power to source from non-Perdue plants; the company has control over its supply chain and could choose to do better.

Overall, these ratings mean that a shopper buying 365-brand chicken is at risk for bringing home a product from one of the most contaminated poultry plants in the country. This is a fact that's not disclosed anywhere on 365-brand product packaging or in Whole Foods' marketing materials. It's also a fact squarely at odds with the "better meat" premium Whole Foods charges for it.

Worse, the Contamination Is Coming from the Most Dangerous Strains

Not all salmonella carries the same risk. Of the more than 2,500 known salmonella serotypes, fewer than 100 are typically linked to human illness, and a much smaller handful account for most of the danger.[26] *Salmonella Infantis*, *Salmonella Enteritidis*, and *Salmonella Typhimurium* are considered high-virulence serotypes most associated with severe illness, invasive infection, hospitalization, and death. Nationally, these three strains have come to dominate the poultry industry's salmonella problem. In 2014, together, they accounted for 24.3 percent of salmonella in poultry, but by 2025 that figure had jumped to 67.9 percent.[27] This means that salmonella is increasingly concentrated in the serotypes most likely to cause serious human illness.

At every one of the plants supplying 365-brand chicken in our sample, high-virulence serotypes dominate (see Figure 3; full data in Appendix A "Prevalence of High-Virulence Serotypes (2025)").

26 "Serotypes Profile of Salmonella Isolates from Meat and Poultry Products: January 1998 through December 2014," USDA FSIS, accessed June 10, 2026.

27 "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

Figure 3. Prevalence of High-Virulence Serotypes at Plants Supplying 365-Brand Chicken (2025)

	HIGH-VIRULENCE	INFANTIS	TYPHIMURIUM	ENTERITIDIS
Perdue • P2178 • CAT 3	83.1%	35.1%	16.2%	24.3%
Pitman • P27389 • CAT 3	81.1%	27%	2.7%	51.4%
Perdue • P6058 • CAT 3	77.8%	77.8%	0%	0%
Perdue • P1318 • CAT 2	80%	20%	40%	0%
White Lake • P48281 • CAT 2	100%	14.3%	85.7%	0%
Perdue • P19112 • CAT 1	100%	100%	0%	0%

Source: "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026; "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

Among the three plants that failed the FSIS performance standards, Perdue's Georgetown, DE plant (P2178) and Pitman's Sanger, CA plant (P27389) also rank among the nation's worst for prevalence of high-virulence serotypes—#3 and #2, respectively[28]—while at Perdue's Mount Vernon, WA plant (P6058), 77.8 percent is driven entirely by *Infantis*.

Looking at the other plants supplying 365-brand chicken illustrates clearly the problem of FSIS basing its performance ratings on contamination alone. On the face of it, these other plants appear to perform better, falling under Category 1 and Category 2 classifications in FSIS data. However, each one carries high-virulence serotypes in a majority of its positive samples.

Perdue's Milford, DE plant (P1318) and White Lake Foods' Ferndale, NY plant (P48281) both passed the standard with Category 2 ratings, yet both showed high-virulence serotypes in the majority of salmonella-positive samples—80 percent at P1318 and 100 percent at P48281. P1318 samples were 20 percent *Infantis* and 40 percent *Typhimurium*, and at P48281, 85.7 percent were *Typhimurium* and 14.3 percent *Infantis*. Perdue's Cromwell,

28 "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

KY plant (P19112) scored even better on contamination, earning the only Category 1 rating among Whole Foods' suppliers, but its salmonella was 100 percent *Infantis*.

All but one of these plants exceed the 67.9 percent industry-wide rate for Infantis, Enteritidis, and Typhimurium combined. The exception, P1318, is at 60 percent for those three and 80 percent for all high-virulence serotypes, still a majority.

Worse Still, the Bacteria Resist the Drugs Used to Treat Them

The risk posed to consumers, however, is not limited to the specific serotype found in raw chicken; it is also determined by whether that salmonella is resistant to critical antibiotics. Antibiotic resistance occurs when a strain of bacteria survives exposure to a drug that would normally kill it. FSIS classifies a sample as antibiotic-resistant when it resists one or two classes of antibiotics considered highly important to human medicine, and as multidrug-resistant when it resists three or more classes. That distinction determines treatment. Most salmonella infections resolve on their own, without antibiotics, but for infections serious enough to require them, resistance can narrow treatment options considerably, and multidrug resistance can narrow them to the point of failure.

Whole Foods markets its meat, including its 365-brand chicken, on the promise of "No Antibiotics, Ever" animal-raising practices,[29] and five of the plants behind 365-brand chicken are operated by two companies—Perdue and Pitman—that make the same claim about their own animals.[30] But "No Antibiotics Ever" describes how a bird was raised—and, even then, the claim typically applies only to the birds consumers eat, not necessarily to the tens of thousands of parent birds kept for breeding to produce the birds consumers eat. It says nothing about a second, separate question: once salmonella is on the meat, can it be treated with antibiotics if it makes someone sick? Those are two different things, and the data show that a "No Antibiotics Ever" label only answers the first one. Despite their animal-raising claims, both companies' plants show high rates of antibiotic resistance and multidrug resistance in FSIS testing. This means that a conscientious consumer seeking out antibiotic-free meat to avoid contributing to the global crisis of antibiotic resistance is nonetheless supporting the very companies whose plants are infiltrating the food supply with some of the most antibiotic-resistant salmonella in the country.

At the plants supplying Whole Foods' 365-brand chicken, rates of antibiotic resistance and multidrug resistance are extremely high. We tracked resistance at these plants in two ways: 1) rates of resistance *overall* in all serotypes (including low-virulence) found at the plant (see Figure 4; full data in Appendix B "Rates of Antibiotic Resistance and Multidrug Resistance (2025)") and 2) rates of

29 "Our Meat: No Antibiotics, Ever," Whole Foods Market, accessed August 13, 2026. Note: We also include the link to this page captured on the Wayback Machine Internet Archive in the event that Whole Foods removes or edits this page at a later date.

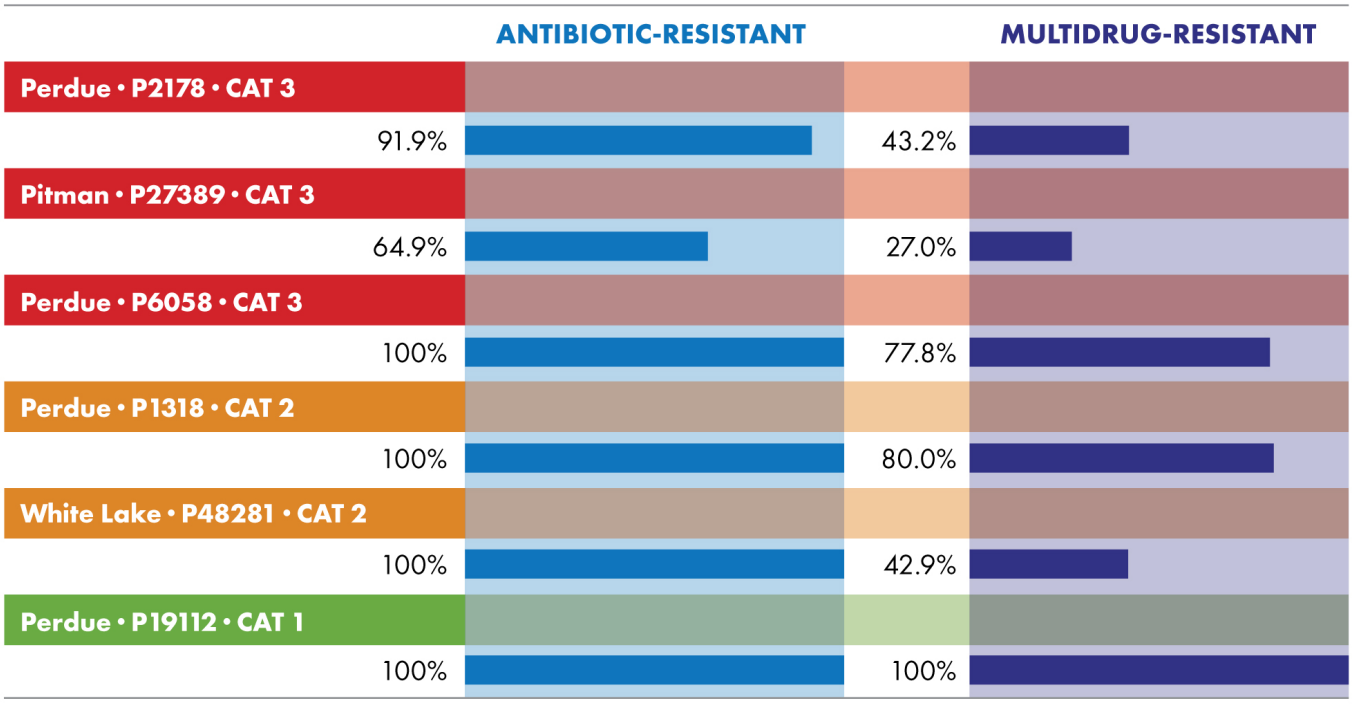
30 "FAQ: How are Perdue Chickens Raised," Perdue Farms, accessed August 13, 2026.

resistance in the top three high-virulence serotypes (see Figure 5; full data in Appendix C "Rates of Antibiotic Resistance and Multidrug Resistance in Top High-Virulence Serotypes (2025)").

The importance of tracking the prevalence of antibiotic resistance in high-virulence serotypes is obvious: when people are infected by the strains most likely to cause serious illness, hospitalization, and death, antibiotic resistance in those serotypes directly threatens the ability of antibiotics to treat them. For instance, when poultry contaminated with a specific form of *Infantis* causes invasive infection in a person, if that strain of *Infantis* is resistant to the drugs required to treat that infection, there may simply be no medical treatment available.

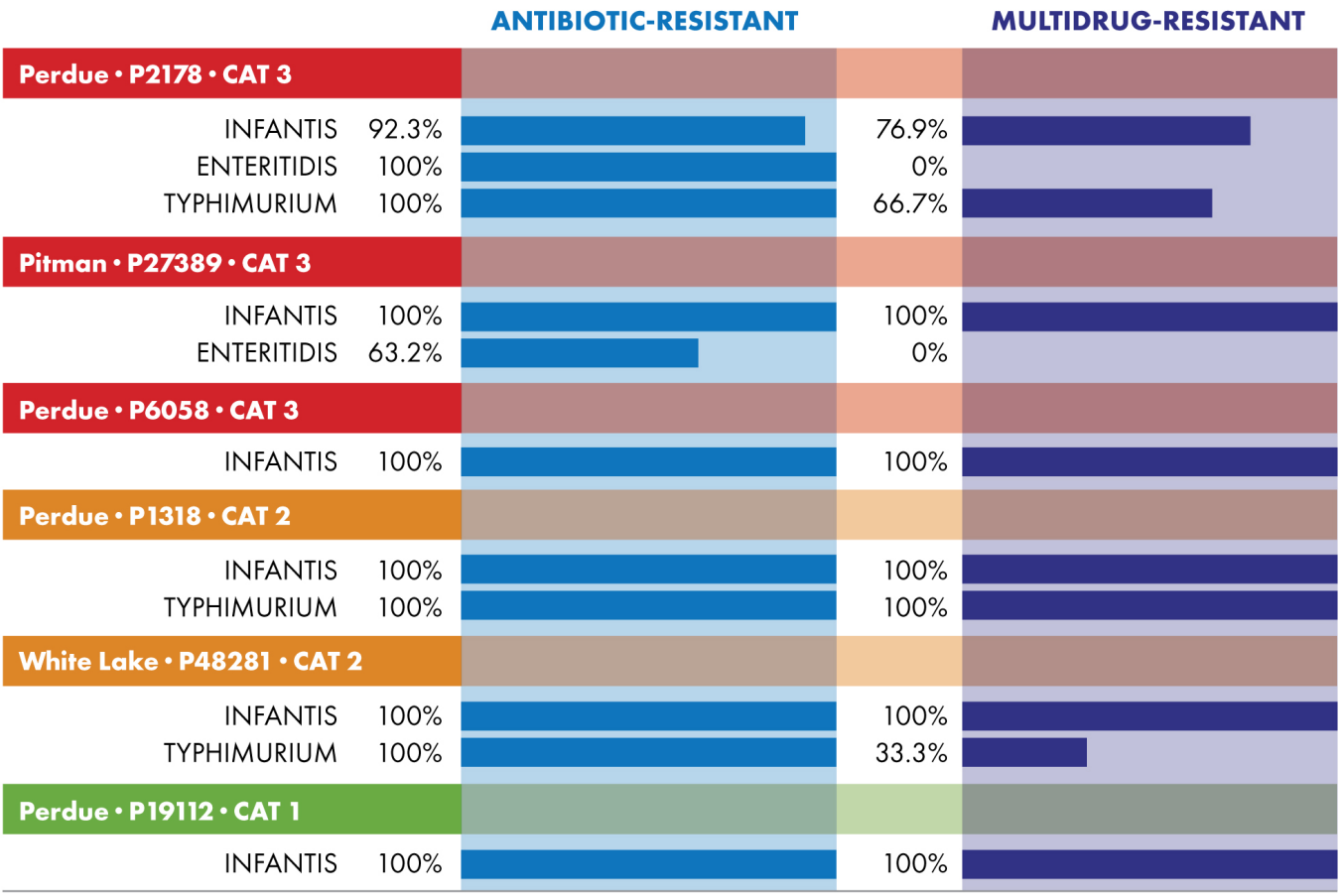
The importance of tracking the prevalence of *overall* resistance may seem less obvious. If a low-virulence serotype that is unlikely to cause human illness develops resistance, why does resistance matter? Antibiotic resistance in high-virulence serotypes poses the highest risk to consumers, but antibiotic resistance in any serotype can confer resistance to other strains of salmonella and to other forms of bacteria (like E. coli), contributing to the growing crisis of antibiotic resistance, as the efficacy of more critical antibiotics is compromised.

Figure 4. Category Rating and Overall Antibiotic Resistance at Plants Supplying 365-Brand Chicken (2025)



Source: "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026; "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

Figure 5. Antibiotic Resistance by Serotype at Plants Supplying 365-Brand Chicken (2025)



Source: "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026; "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

Resistance was high across all three plants that failed on contamination. At Perdue's Georgetown, DE plant (P2178), 91.9 percent of positive samples showed resistance, and 43.2 percent were multidrug-resistant, ranking it #2 for resistance, and #3 for multidrug resistance.[31] At Pitman's Sanger, CA plant (P27389), resistance was lower overall (64.9 per-cent) but multidrug-resistant Infantis samples reached 100 percent, among the highest rates found at any plant nationally. And at Perdue's Mount Vernon, WA plant (P6058), whose raw contamination rate was the lowest of the three failing plants at roughly 1 in 8 samples, and which FSIS rates Category 1 for the chicken parts that make up the bulk of its 365-brand supply, 77.8 percent of all positive samples were multidrug-resistant. Both P2178 and P27389 also showed substantial resistance to Highest Priority Critically Important Antimicrobials (the WHO's highest-priority tier of critically important antibiotics): 62.2 percent and 59.5 percent of positive samples, re-spectively. At P2178, resistance extended well beyond that single drug class. At this plant, 70.3 percent of positive samples showed resistance to Highly Important Antimicrobials (a broader category of drugs still considered significant to human medicine).

31 "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

A similar track record was found at the plants that passed the FSIS performance standard. Perdue's Milford, DE plant (P1318) and Perdue's Cromwell, KY plant (P19112)—the two plants supplying the largest share of 365-brand chicken—showed rates of 80 and 100 percent multidrug-resistant salmonella of all positive samples, respectively, and White Lake Foods' Ferndale, NY plant (P48281) showed 42.9 percent. Resistance to Highest Priority Critically Important Antimicrobials reached 100 percent at P19112 (all four positive samples), 40 percent at P1318 (two of five) and 28.6 percent at P48281 (two of seven). Resistance to Highly Important Antimicrobials appeared in every positive sample at all three passing plants, as it did at the failing P6058 plant.

These data explain why contamination rate alone cannot be understood as a stand-alone indicator of food safety. Although a lower positivity rate signals fewer opportunities for being infected by salmonella, it does not indicate a safer product if virtually all of the salmonella found in a plant comes from the strains most likely to make people sick and least likely to respond to treatment. When plants like P1318 and P19112 are judged only by how often their chicken tests positive, they appear to be the safest plants supplying 365-brand chicken. But judged by what salmonella is actually present at the plant when the chicken does test positive, they become significantly more concerning.

Even the better-performing plants for contamination show significant concentrations of high-virulence and antibiotic-resistant strains. At minimum, across the plants, at least 77.8 percent of positive samples were high-virulence serotypes, at least 64.9 percent showed antibiotic resistance, and at least a quarter were multidrug-resistant, reaching 100 percent at P19112. In real terms, no plant in the 365-brand chicken supply chain shows contamination that is more likely to be treatable than not.

Perdue's Georgetown, DE plant (P2178) and Pitman's Sanger, CA plant (P27389) rank among the nation's highest-risk facilities on every metric—contamination, virulence, resistance, and multidrug resistance. In Farm Forward's composite ranking of the highest-risk plants in the country, accounting for all four metrics together, P2178 ranks #2 nationally and P27389 ranks #4.[32] Thus, two of the four highest-risk poultry plants in the United States are supplying chicken to Whole Foods' "better meat" brand.

Presented with numbers like these, the industry typically responds by saying something to the effect of: cook chicken properly, and none of this matters.

Cooking chicken to 165°F kills salmonella. This is undisputed, but poultry companies fall back on including safe-handling instructions on the label as proof that contamination at the plant is not their problem to solve; it's the consumer's job to cook their way out of whatever risk their products pose. But you can't cook your cutting boards or your kids' hands.

Whole Foods relies on the same logic of making consumers responsible for disease risk through safe-handling practices, but it lands differently for a company whose premium rests on the claim that it has already vetted the product for the consumer. Safe-handling instructions appear on every package of raw chicken sold in the U.S., regardless of price or brand, which means they are not a meaningful food-safety differentiator for a product marketed and priced as a step above the rest. Consumers have no way of knowing that the chicken in their cart came from one of the plants with the highest rates of contamination, high-virulence serotypes, and antibiotic resistance. Whole Foods' "better meat" promise likely leads shoppers to assume "better" means "safer." For 365-brand chicken, it doesn't. In many cases, it's one of the riskier products on the market.

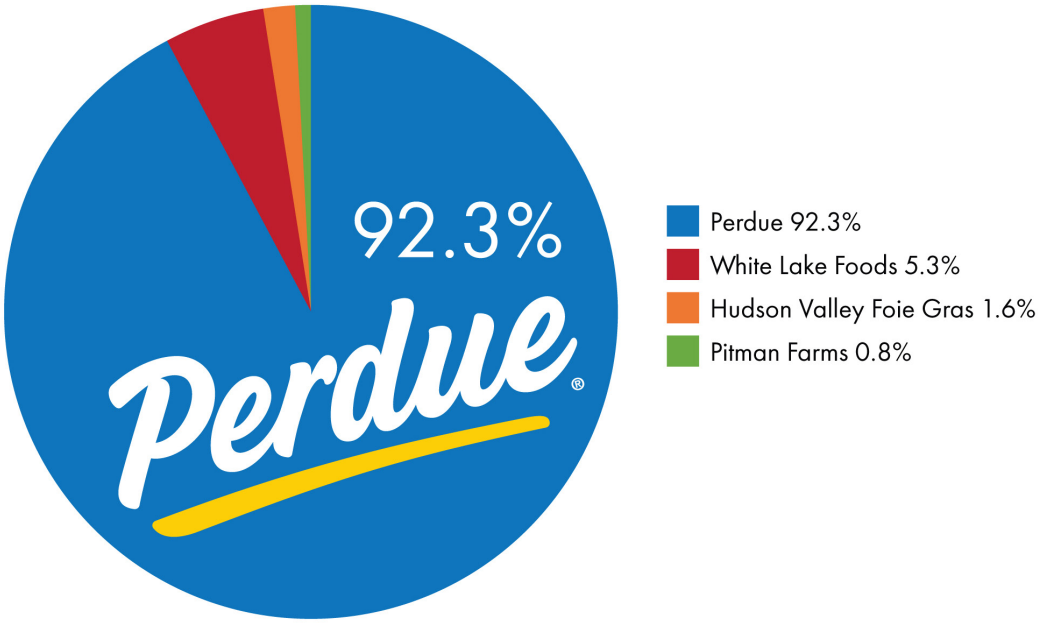
32 "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

Whole Foods Chicken Is, in Most Cases, Perdue Chicken

Having established that much of the 365-brand chicken at Whole Foods comes from plants with serious, chronic salmonella problems, we turned to the question of who actually supplies this chicken, and found that the answer, in the overwhelming majority of cases, is Perdue.

Perdue Farms is one of the largest poultry producers in the United States, alongside companies like Tyson and Pilgrim's Pride, and was reported to slaughter and process more than 12 million birds per week in 2020.[33] Perdue supplies both its own branded products (sold under Perdue and Harvestland labels) and private-label chicken sold under other companies' store brands, including, as this investigation found, Whole Foods' 365 label. Perdue-processed products made up the majority of 365-brand chicken at every store in all six sales regions (this was the case even in the two sales regions where Perdue raw chicken was largely unavailable from mainstream retailers). 92.3 percent (228 of 247) of 365-brand products in our sample with an identifiable establishment number were processed by Perdue (see Figure 1 in the previous section for the full list of plants supplying 365-brand chicken).

Figure 6. Share of 365-Brand Chicken By Supplying Company



33 "2020 Processor of the Year: Plant Operations at Perdue Farms," Food Processing, December 6, 2020.

It's important to note here that not all plants supplying 365-brand chicken perform equally poorly. As detailed in the previous section, our sample included plants ranging from relatively low contamination to those with some of the worst contamination in the industry.

Beyond Perdue, two additional slaughter facilities appear in our sample: White Lake Foods, LLC supplied 5.3 percent (13 of 247 products) and Pitman Farms supplied 0.8 percent (2 of 247). White Lake Foods is a small slaughter and processing company typically operating in the premium retail sector and supplying chicken to retailers under private-label brands, like Whole Foods' 365. Because it does not sell chicken to consumers under its own name, there is no public-facing marketing available to assess how it brands itself in terms of labeling claims around quality, safety, or animal-handling practices.

The third supplier of 365-brand chicken in our sample is Pitman Farms, which sells chicken under the "Mary's Chicken" brand. It's worth spending some time on Mary's, despite the company's supplying such a small share of 365-brand chicken in our sample. Whole Foods also carries chicken under the Mary's Chicken brand, and although our audit was not focused on the Mary's Chicken products, it appears that Whole Foods sells Mary's brand chicken in many of its stores. Mary's is marketed as a high-welfare brand, and its packaging and website advertise "No Antibiotics Ever," "Free Range" animal-raising practices, and certification through the Global Animal Partnership's (GAP) 5-Step® Rating Program, a certification system Whole Foods itself co-founded and now applies across its own meat and poultry lines. The brand also markets a specific food-safety claim: that its "state of the art 'Air Chill' system...helps inhibit the spread of bacteria by keeping all the chickens independent" during processing,[34] as opposed to the water-chilling method used elsewhere in the industry. More broadly, the company describes its mission in explicitly health-oriented terms: CEO David Pitman says the brand was born from his mother's "passion and dedication for providing nutritious and healthy food for her family and yours."[35]

Where Perdue is one of the largest poultry companies in the country, Pitman is a fraction of its size, and its brand identity trades specifically on the kind of small-farm, higher-welfare positioning—now extending to bacteria control itself—that might reassure a shopper skeptical of large industrial poultry operations. Perdue, notably, makes a parallel claim through a different method: rather than air-chilling, Perdue uses water-chilling, in which "chickens are immersed in a cold-water bath to quickly cool the temperature of the meat to promote food safety" and pH-adjusting solutions are used "to reduce and inhibit bacteria growth while processing chicken."[36] Two different chilling methods, two different companies, two different food-safety pledges, and the same result: plants with some of the worst salmonella records in the country. Whatever welfare standards, "nutritious and healthy food," or bacteria-inhibiting technology these brands promise, neither has delivered plants free of dangerous contamination. Pitman's plant supplying 365-brand chicken sits in the same tier as Perdue's worst-performing facilities, and on some measures, including multidrug resistance in *Infantis* (100 percent, versus 76.9 percent at P2178), it is worse. The findings in this report suggest that food-safety problems may be a function of practices and conditions common across the industry, regardless of scale, how a brand markets itself, or what specific claims it makes about controlling contamination.

34 "Air Chilled Chicken," Pitman Farms' Mary's Chicken, accessed August 13, 2026.

35 "Meet the Farmers: David Pitman of Pitman Family Farms," Bristol Farms, accessed October 1, 2026.

36 "FAQ: How are Perdue Farms Chickens Processed," Perdue Farms, accessed August 13, 2026.

Perdue's scale also makes possible a second layer of analysis that Pitman's and White Lake's smaller footprints do not.[37] Because Perdue supplies both Whole Foods and mainstream retailers in the same markets, we could compare prices for chicken from the same plants. The overlap and price differential findings in this report, then, are specific to Perdue, which accounts for 92.3 percent of our 365-brand sample and is also where the bulk of the story lives.

Figure 1 above reflects all 30 stores in our audit, including the two sales regions, California and Central West, where Perdue chicken was largely unavailable at nearby mainstream retailers. The overlap and price analyses later in this report are narrower, covering only the 19 markets where a direct Whole Foods-to-mainstream-retailer comparison was possible. See Figure 7 for price premiums and Appendix F "Price Comparison for Chicken Sourced from the Same Plant" for full pricing data; for plant overlap between Whole Foods and mainstream retailers, see Appendix D "Plant Overlap by Market (Any Raw Chicken Product, Any Cut)" and Appendix E "Plant Overlap by Market (Matched Product Type/Cut and Production Claim)."

We tracked plant overlap between Whole Foods and mainstream retailers in two ways. First, we looked at the retailer level: did the Whole Foods store and its paired mainstream retailer source from any of the same plants, regardless of which product type (e.g., whole chicken, ground chicken) was on the shelf? And second, at the product level: was the identical product type/cut, with the identical production claim—meaning both products were labeled organic, or both were conventional/non-organic—sourced from the identical plant at both stores? The first is a broader measure of similarities across the supply chain; the second is a more conservative, focused analysis, and the one informing the price comparisons later in this report.

Markets sharing any plant

14/19

74% of matched markets

Matched products from the same plant

8/17

47% of comparable markets

Full market-by-market establishment numbers are in Appendices D and E.

Full market-by-market results where markets share any plant are shown in Appendix D. In 74 percent (14 of 19) of the matched markets, Whole Foods and its nearby mainstream counterpart sourced some portion of their raw chicken from at least one common Perdue plant.

When we cross-referenced the plant numbers on Perdue-sourced 365-brand chicken against the identical product type/cut and production claim sold at a paired mainstream retailer, we found direct overlap in plants, including Perdue's P1318 plant in

37 Pitman's plant appeared in our sample only in California and Central West Whole Foods sales regions, where Perdue chicken was largely unavailable at a mainstream retailer at all. Our mainstream-retailer audit was built to track Perdue and Harvestland products specifically, so it was not designed to capture a comparison point for White Lake Foods. We captured only limited, non-comparative pricing for these two suppliers at Whole Foods alone.

Milford, DE, Perdue's P19112 plant in Cromwell, KY, and Perdue's P2178 plant in Georgetown, DE (full market-by-market results where markets have an exact product match are shown in Appendix E "Plant Overlap by Market (Matched Product Type/Cut and Production Claim)").

There were 17 markets where Whole Foods and the mainstream retailer we audited sold the exact same product types with the same production claims. (In the Columbus, Ohio, and Miami, Florida, markets, there was no identical product at the matched mainstream retailers to compare to the 365-brand products at Whole Foods.) Of those 17, nearly half (8 out of 17) turned up the identical plant number on both the Whole Foods and mainstream-retailer packaging for the same product types.

In practice, a shopper in nearly half (8 out of 17) of those markets could walk into a Whole Foods and pay a premium for chicken slaughtered and processed at the same facility, of the exact same product type and organic-or-conventional status, as chicken sold for the same price or less at Walmart or another mainstream retailer nearby. In most of our matched comparisons, it was substantially less. This retailer overlap, discussed above, means a shopper is likely to encounter Perdue-sourced products from a shared plant somewhere in the vast majority of matched markets (even in the markets where the specific product type they buy doesn't happen to match).

Across the 17 markets with comparable products, including those where no single product matched at the plant level, the same three Perdue plants—in Milford, DE (P1318), Cromwell, KY (P19112), and Georgetown, DE (P2178)—account for 88.1 percent of the 365-brand chicken in those markets and 41 percent of the Perdue chicken we recorded at the paired mainstream retailers. They are the three plants that supply roughly 80 percent of all 365-branded chicken in our sample. The mainstream retailers in these markets also drew heavily on two large Perdue plants, P9197 and P7903, that supplied none of the 365-brand chicken in our sample. What the overlap establishes, then, is not that the two product lines are the same chicken, but that a shopper paying the 365 premium is, in a substantial share of cases, buying from the same facility as the shopper who paid less.

None of this is disclosed in Whole Foods' promise of better meat. The company lists "traceability" as its first meat quality standard, but Whole Foods makes no special effort to give consumers real transparency into the companies, processing plants, or farms raising, killing, and packaging the chicken (or other meats) it sells. The only identifiable information available to consumers is the processing plant, requiring shoppers to decode the USDA establishment number printed in small type on the package (e.g., P2178). Even that decoding fails in two ways. For 1.6 percent of products in our sample, the only number on the package belongs to Hudson Valley Foie Gras in Ferndale, NY (P8757), a packing and further-processing facility rather than a slaughterhouse, and the slaughter plant is not disclosed at all. And 13 packages in California (4 of which we excluded from the sample) carried two different establishment numbers: P6402A in the lot code, which identifies a downstream processing facility and appears nowhere in FSIS's salmonella testing records, and P6058—Perdue's Mount Vernon, WA plant, where the birds were actually slaughtered—in the USDA mark of inspection. Nothing on the package tells a shopper which to look up, and on 4 of the 13 the mark of inspection wasn't legible at all.

Decoding an establishment number is not a step Whole Foods asks shoppers to take, nor does the company disclose that this information is even available to shoppers willing to do the work of looking up

each plant for each product they're considering. We did this work ourselves—in addition to analyzing the even more technically difficult-to-access, and more complicated, FSIS surveillance dataset—plant by plant, across 30 locations. Given that Whole Foods claims transparency and traceability as a standard it already meets, this is the work a consumer might expect that company to be doing, and disclosing, on its own.

It's also important to be precise about what an establishment number does and does not communicate. It identifies only where a bird was slaughtered and processed. It does not provide any information about where the bird was raised, by which producer, and under what conditions. Whole Foods might point to its Global Animal Partnership (GAP) certification as covering that gap. GAP does set standards for how animals are raised. But a GAP tier reflects a set of practices and standards a supplier has agreed to follow, verified through GAP's own audit process. What it does not provide is something a shopper can use: a way to trace the specific bird in a specific package back to the specific farm that raised them, or to verify that bird was actually raised to that standard. GAP's certification tells them what a supplier promises; it doesn't make available a traceable record for the package in their cart. Whole Foods' "transparency and traceability to farm or ranch" claim implies that it provides that complete picture.[38] Whole Foods, however, does not even reveal this information when asked. Farm Forward requested traceability information for 365-brand raw chicken products. Whole Foods reported that it was not able to provide this information, citing its "Statement on Broiler Chicken Welfare" page on the company website as the only resource available on sourcing[39]—a page that provides no specific farm information. The most we can establish, then, is the processing plant, and even that took independent research to trace. This represents a genuine limit on what this report (or any researcher, for that matter) can establish. We cannot verify that a 365-brand bird and a mainstream-brand bird slaughtered at the same plant were raised on the same farm, under the same conditions. What we can verify is that Whole Foods is the only party in a position to answer that question, and it claimed it was unable to do so when asked.

This limitation extends to online sales as well, and even more so. When a customer shops for a 365 raw chicken product on Amazon.com, nothing about the information on the listing allows them to find out in advance which plant will have processed the product they are about to receive. 365-brand products on Amazon.com are represented by generic product photos, some of which do show a plant number, but because the product listing is a generic one, a customer cannot reliably depend on their order matching the plant number they see in that photo—and has no way to check before the order is placed.

365-brand chicken is priced and marketed as a distinct, higher-tier product than its mainstream retailer counterparts. But for the majority of the supply chain, it is sourced from the same company (and often the same processing plants) as the budget retail chicken available to consumers nationwide.

38 "Meat Department Quality Standards," Whole Foods Market.

39 "Statement on Broiler Chicken Welfare," Whole Foods Market, accessed September 15, 2026. Note: We also include the link to this page captured on the Wayback Machine Internet Archive in the event that Whole Foods removes or edits this page at a later date.

Consumers Are Paying Premium Prices for Chicken from Plants with Dangerous Salmonella Contamination

Having established which plants supply Whole Foods' 365-brand chicken, and how contaminated those plants are, we turned to a simpler question: what does that chicken actually cost, compared to chicken from the same plants sold elsewhere?

In Minneapolis, Whole Foods was selling 365-brand boneless skinless thighs at $5.99 and $5.49 per pound. A 15-minute drive away, that same day, Walmart carried boneless skinless thighs sourced from the same plant—Perdue's Cromwell, KY plant (P19112)—for $3.94 per pound. Every 365 package on the shelf was at least 39 percent more expensive than the Walmart product for the same product type; across the two, the premium averaged 45.7 percent.

To answer the question of cost, we compared prices for chicken sourced from the identical plant and production claim at Whole Foods and a nearby mainstream retailer. This raises a fair question: a processing plant doesn't raise the chickens it slaughters, so does sourcing from the same plant really mean the same product? For the purposes of this analysis, it does, and for three reasons. First, the food-safety findings in this report (contamination rate, serotype, and antibiotic resistance) are determined by what happens inside the plant, not on the farm. FSIS assigns category ratings to slaughter/processing facilities because cross-contamination between birds from different farms often occurs on the slaughter line. Second, every price comparison matches not just the plant but the production claim (organic to organic, conventional to conventional). Third, the birds themselves are typically the same conventional fast-growing breeds: 365-brand chicken is certified under the Global Animal Partnership's tiered welfare program, which does not require slower-growing breeds at the tier where it is certified,[40] suggesting that 365-brand chicken is generally the same breeds used industry-wide (with rare exceptions—one product in our sample was labeled GAP Step 4, a tier that does require slower-growing breeds, though it was not among the products included in our price comparison).

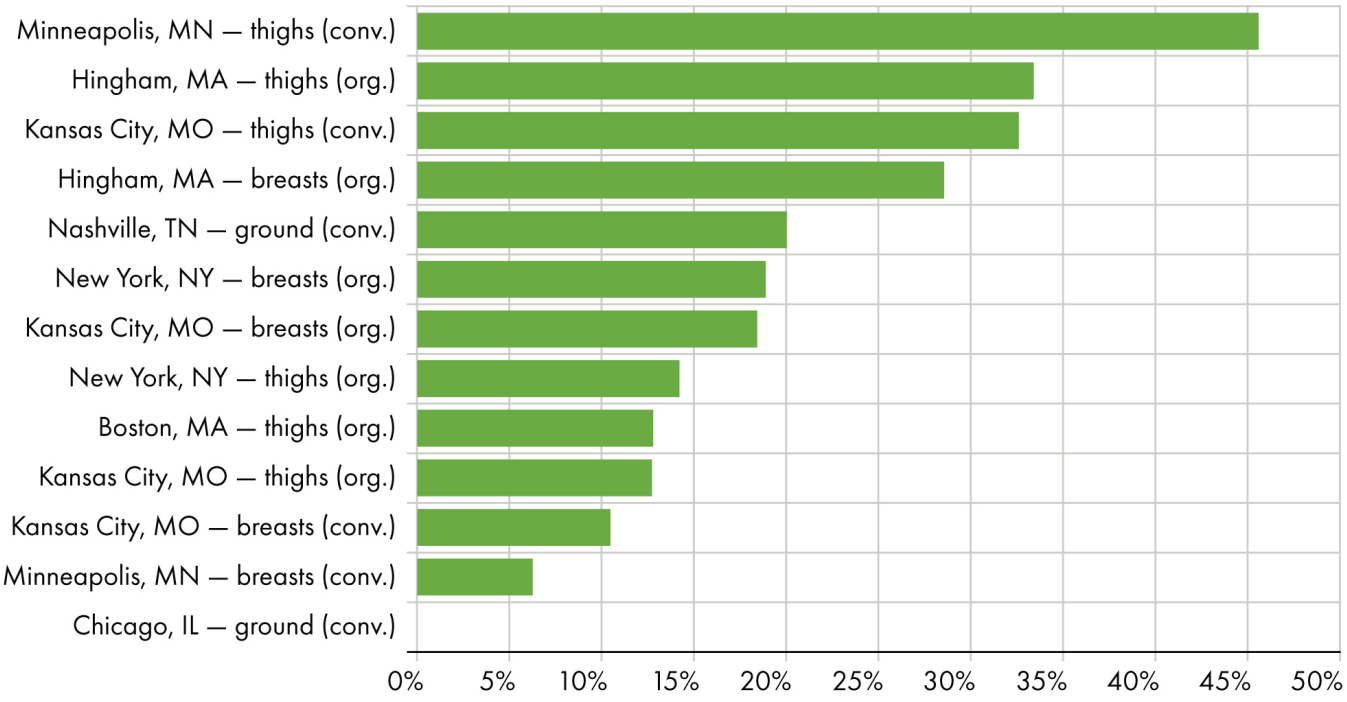
Whole Foods might object that its GAP certification makes 365 a genuinely different product regardless of breed, but GAP tier alone does not change what happens to the bird at the plant, and as detailed below, the specific tier at which 365-brand chicken is

40 Global Animal Partnership's 5-Step® Animal Welfare Standards for Chickens Raised for Meat v4.1 permits the use of conventional, fast-growing commercial breeds (such as Cobb 500 and Ross 308) at Steps 1 through 3. A requirement to use G.A.P.-approved, slower-growing breeds applies only at Step 4 and above. 365-brand chicken in our sample was certified almost entirely at Step 2 or Step 3. Source: Global Animal Partnership, "5-Step® Animal Welfare Rating Program Standards for Chickens Raised for Meat v4.1," accessed September 15, 2026.

certified does not require the one input—slower-growing genetics—that would meaningfully differentiate the resulting meat. (Other GAP requirements at this tier, such as additional space or environmental enrichment, affect how the bird was raised, but not the breed or, so far as this report's findings show, the plant-level food-safety profile of the product that reaches the shelf.) If Whole Foods sources meaningfully different birds for its 365 line despite an identical, plant, production claim, and breed standard, that information is not readily available.

Of 43 like-for-like product pairings across 17 markets, 14 were sourced from the identical plant, and 13 of those had usable price information at both stores. These 13 are the basis for our price comparisons. (See Appendix G "Methodology" for full sampling and matching detail.)

Figure 7. Whole Foods Price Premium Over Mainstream Retailers, by Market and Product



In 12 of the 13 comparisons in our sample, Whole Foods was charging more for the same type of product from the same plant (see Figure 7; full data shown in Appendix F "Price Comparison for Chicken Sourced from the Same Plant"). Sometimes the price differential was modest (34 cents a pound, or 6.3 percent, on conventional breasts in Minneapolis, MN), and sometimes it was dramatic ($2.00 per pound on both organic breasts and organic thighs in Hingham, MA). In none of the 13 was the Whole Foods store price lower than the mainstream retailer's.

Across those 13 comparisons, Whole Foods charged 19.6 percent more, on average, and 18.5 percent more at the median, for chicken traced to the same plants as its mainstream competitors. This reflected a typical gap of $1.11 per pound, ranging from no premium at all in one comparison to a 45.7 percent markup in another.

Paying the Whole Foods premium did not mean that consumers were lowering their salmonella exposure risk. The single highest-risk plant in this analysis—Perdue's Georgetown, DE facility (P2178), ranked #2 among the highest-risk plants in the country[41]—supplied 365-brand chicken carrying a real price premium in Nashville (20 percent more) and the identical price in Chicago. There is, in fact, no plant in our sample where a higher price bought a safer product. Nor does the gap look like a simple markup for shopping at a more expensive store. Overhead and shopping experience as cost indicators would apply evenly to every product, but chicken from the identical plant, sold the same week, varied widely depending on the product and market.



Whole Foods' shelf tags promise "Low Price. Same High Standards." Neither claim holds up for 365-brand chicken. The price isn't low: it's a premium over chicken sourced from the same plants sold at mainstream retailers. And the standard isn't high: these are plants that rank among the worst in the country for contamination, high-virulence serotypes, and antibiotic resistance.

So what, exactly, is a 365 shopper paying more for? It doesn't appear that it's for a safer product, a different processor, or different food-safety practices—or, per the discussion above, a genuinely different bird. In many of the cases documented here, they are paying more for chicken from the exact same processing plants whose salmonella records show they pose a significant health risk.

41 "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

Paying for a Pledge Whole Foods Never Kept

Even setting the contamination findings aside, the price for 365-brand chicken doesn't add up. The usual justification for a welfare premium is that higher standards cost money. And welfare improvements like more space and enrichment (both of which Whole Foods identifies as core to its animal welfare standards) *do* cost more to implement than conventional production. But one variable is worth isolating here, because Whole Foods has stopped talking about it: the chicken's breed. In 2016, Whole Foods pledged to phase out fast-growing chicken breeds by 2024, a standard now widely known as the Better Chicken Commitment.[42] This commitment came after the company concluded that conventional fast-growing breeds carry "unresolvable welfare issues,"[43] but the 2024 deadline passed without Whole Foods implementing this shift. This pledge was tied to Global Animal Partnership (GAP), the tiered welfare certification Whole Foods co-founded, as noted earlier, and uses to rate its own meat and poultry. But there is no slower-growing breed requirement in the tier at which 365-brand chicken is certified.[44] As a companion Farm Forward report, "The Root of the Problem: How Whole Foods Abandoned Its Promise on Chicken Genetics," shows,[45] fast-growing breeds continue to make up the overwhelming majority of Whole Foods' supply chain, so it's unlikely that slower-growing breeds are what's justifying the higher price. (See "Limitations" in Appendix G "Methodology" for a discussion of GAP labeling on the mainstream-retailer side of our price comparisons.)

The cost of the Better Chicken Commitment and its European counterpart, the European Chicken Commitment, is well documented. Peer-reviewed modeling puts the added cost of raising slower-growing birds at roughly 11 to 25 percent per pound above conventional production, depending on the target market weight.[46] A 2024 analysis commissioned by AVEC, the EU poultry processors' association, found a 21.9 percent increase in cost per bird, or 37.5 percent per kilogram of meat, because it assumed slower-growing birds yield less meat.[47] An

42 "The Better Chicken Commitment," Better Chicken Commitment, accessed August 13, 2026.

43 "Whole Foods Market Applauds Global Animal Partnership," Whole Foods Market, accessed August 13, 2026.

44 365-brand chicken is certified at GAP's Step 2 or Step 3. GAP added a slow-growth requirement across all tiers in its June 2025 standard (v4.0), then reversed it for Steps 1-3 in its June 2026 update (v4.1), which now permits conventional fast-growing breeds (Cobb 500, Ross 308, Ross 708) at those tiers. Slow-growth genetics are required only at Step 4 and above.

45 "The Root of the Problem: How Whole Foods Abandoned Its Promise on Chicken Genetics," Farm Forward, October 2026.

46 Jayson Lusk et al., "The Cost and Market Impacts of Slow-Growth Broilers," Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics 44, no. 3 (2019): 536–550.

47 Jason Gittins, Ryan Douglas, and Toby Townsend, "Costs and Implications of the European Chicken Commitment in the EU," RSK ADAS Ltd for AVEC: The Association of Poultry Processors and Poultry Trade in the EU Countries, March 2024, ii.

independent 2025 Wageningen University study of six EU countries found increases of roughly 16 to 19 percent per kilogram, depending on the stage of the supply chain, and attributed AVEC's higher figure to its yield assumptions and cost-allocation method.[48] Most of the added cost comes from the breed itself: slower-growing birds eat more per pound of muscle weight they gain, and in AVEC's model higher feed and chick costs make up more than half of the increase. Lower stocking density adds meaningful housing and labor costs, but enrichments like straw and perches add comparatively little, and in some cases none at all.[49] Genetics remains one of the two parts of "better meat" clearly shown, across multiple studies, to be genuinely expensive.

That 11-to-25-percent range is the real cost of "better." Our price comparison found Whole Foods charging 19.6 percent more on average for 365-brand chicken traced to Perdue's plants than the same product type sold at mainstream retailers from the same facilities, and as high as 45.7 percent in one comparison and as low as zero in another. A real cost increase from slower-growing genetics would show up consistently across markets, since the added feed cost per bird doesn't change by geography.

The 45.7-to-zero percent swing in price for chicken from the same plant appears instead to be pricing set by what a market will bear, not by what a bird costs to raise.

This isn't new for Whole Foods. A 2017 Bloomberg investigation found Whole Foods pricing 365-brand chicken from Perdue plants at roughly twice the price of Perdue chicken sold through other retailers, and in at least one case found 365-brand drumsticks priced *below* the equivalent Perdue product.[50] A markup that swings from well above a competitor's price to below it, for chicken from the same plant, is not what a genuine cost pass-through looks like.

For the chicken in our sample, there is no evidence of a slower-growing-breed cost to pass through. 365-brand chicken products are certified at the same tier that permits the same conventional fast-growing breeds sold by conventional retailers, and there is no indication that these are different breeds from those Whole Foods promised a decade ago to phase out. Whatever the premium is buying does not appear to be genetics, and it is not food safety either. Whole Foods is charging a premium for a standard that isn't being met.

48 Peter van Horne et al., "Impact of the European Chicken Commitment (ECC) Broiler Production System on Economics, the Environment and Food Safety," Report 2025-138, Wageningen Social & Economic Research, August 2025.

49 Gittins et al., "Costs and Implications of the European Chicken Commitment in the EU," Table 13, 19; van Horne et al., "Impact of the European Chicken Commitment," Table 3.1; Luuk S.M. Vissers et al., "Global Prospects of the Cost-Efficiency of Broiler Welfare in Middle-Segment Production Systems," Animals 9, no. 7 (2019): 473; Philip J. Jones et al., "The Productivity and Financial Impacts of Eight Types of Environmental Enrichment for Broiler Chickens," Animals 10, no. 3 (2020): 378. In AVEC's model, feed (+27.8 eurocents) and day-old chicks (+6.0) account for 33.8 of the 60.0-eurocent increase per bird; capital costs and labor add 17.3; litter and enrichments add 0.8. In the Netherlands, Wageningen found housing (+7.4 to +10.9 cents per kg live weight) and labor (+2.7 to +4.4) rose more than feed (+6.8). Holding breed constant, the Jones et al. controlled trial found individual welfare interventions (straw bales, perches, platforms, reduced stocking density, increased feed/water spacing) changed net margin per kg by less than 5 percentage points in every case tested, with one intervention showing a net financial improvement.

50 "That Chicken From Whole Foods Isn't So Special Anymore," Bloomberg, via Fortune, August 14, 2017.

Recommendations

These findings indicate failures in food safety at every level: a retailer marketing "better meat" without meaningful standards behind it, suppliers failing federal standards without consequence, and a federal agency that, under current law, cannot order a recall, halt processing, or shut down a plant based on salmonella test results alone, no matter how chronic its contamination record.[51]

To Whole Foods:

- **Disclose supplier plants, FSIS category ratings, and serotype and antibiotic-resistance records at the point of sale.** Currently, a shopper who wants to find out where a package of chicken was processed has to decode a USDA establishment number and cross-reference it with a federal database.

- **Extend "traceability" claims to cover farm-of-origin information, not just the processing plant.** An establishment number identifies where a bird was slaughtered, not where or how it was raised.

- **Adopt sourcing criteria based on contamination, virulence, and resistance data.** Whole Foods should set, publish, and enforce specific thresholds for contamination rate, high-virulence serotype prevalence, and antibiotic resistance as conditions for suppliers of 365-brand chicken, and stop sourcing from plants that fail to meet them.

- **Require suppliers to test for and publicly report serotype and antibiotic-resistance data.** FSIS already collects these data; Whole Foods should require its suppliers to share them and should publish them for consumers, rather than leaving that work to outside researchers.

- **Institute a right-of-reply policy for transparency and traceability claims.** Consumers should be able to contact Whole Foods for traceability information and receive a substantive reply that satisfies their questions about the origin and production practices for the products the company is selling. Further, retailers and suppliers named in public food-safety findings should respond substantively to these findings, including disclosing corrective actions taken or planned, rather than declining to comment. Silence in the face of consumer inquiries in response to a promise the company itself makes should not be treated as equivalent to a defense.

51 For full reporting on USDA's role in salmonella contamination and regulation, see: "How the USDA & the US Poultry Industry Fail to Protect Americans from Foodborne Disease," Farm Forward, October 2025.

To USDA/FSIS:

- **Incorporate serotype and antibiotic-resistance data into plant category ratings.** The current system treats a plant that barely exceeds the standard the same as one at 90 percent contamination. It doesn't distinguish a low-risk strain from high-virulence, multidrug-resistant *Infantis*. Category ratings should incorporate serotype and resistance data alongside contamination rate, so that a plant's rating better reflects the risk it actually poses to consumers.

- **Reinstate and finalize the rule to classify salmonella as an adulterant in raw poultry.** USDA proposed this reform in August 2024 and withdrew it in April 2025 under industry pressure, leaving the agency able only to request voluntary recalls.

- **Establish enforceable consequences for chronic, repeated failures of the salmonella standard**, rather than allowing plants to fail the same standard year after year with no penalty beyond a general facility review.

To Consumers:

- **Check the establishment number printed on chicken packaging against FSIS's public database** (**see Farm Forward's guide on how to do so**[52]) before assuming a "better meat," premium, or higher-priced label means a safer product. A plant's category rating and testing history are public information, even though retailers make no effort to surface them.

- **Ask retailers directly for the information in this report:** supplier plants, category ratings, serotype and resistance data. Don't accept that this is information only investigators can obtain.

- **Don't rely on cooking alone as a substitute for retailer accountability.** Cooking chicken to a safe internal temperature reduces the risk of illness from any given piece of chicken, but it does not change how contaminated the supply chain was to begin with, and it does not address the antibiotic-resistance risk documented in this report. Safe handling is necessary; it is not a reason to let retailers and suppliers off the hook for what they sell.

52 "How to Find Out If You're Buying Salmonella-Contaminated Poultry From Trusted Poultry Brands," Farm Forward, October 27, 2025.

Appendices

Appendix A. Prevalence of High-Virulence Serotypes (2025)

Company	Establishment Number	Percent Overall High-Virulence	Percent of Positive Samples Infantis	Percent of Positive Samples Typhimurium	Percent of Positive Samples Enteritidis
Perdue	P2178	83.1%	35.1%	16.2%	24.3%
Pitman Farms	P27389	81.1%	27.0%	2.7%	51.4%
Perdue	P6058	77.8%	77.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Perdue	P1318	80.0%	20.0%	40.0%	0.0%
White Lake Foods	P48281	100.0%	14.3%	85.7%	0.0%
Perdue	P19112	100.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026; "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward. Note: The "Overall High-Virulence" numbers include *all* high-virulence strains found at the plant, meaning that the figures for *Infantis, Typhimurium,* and *Enteritidis* may not add up to the overall percentage reflected in the table, as in the case of Perdue P2178 and P1318.

Appendix B. Rates of Antibiotic Resistance and Multidrug Resistance (2025)

Company	Establishment Number	Percent Antibiotic-Resistant	Percent Multidrug-Resistant
Perdue	P2178	91.9%	43.2%
Pitman Farms	P27389	64.9%	27.0%
Perdue	P6058	100.0%	77.8%
Perdue	P1318	100.0%	80.0%
White Lake Foods	P48281	100.0%	42.9%
Perdue	P19112	100.0%	100.0%

Source: "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026; "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward.

Appendix C. Rates of Antibiotic Resistance and Multidrug Resistance in Top High-Virulence Serotypes (2025)

Company	Establishment Number	Serotype	Percent Antibiotic-Resistant	Percent Multidrug-Resistant
Perdue	P2178	Infantis	92.3%	76.9%
		Enteritidis	100.0%	0.0%
		Typhimurium	100.0%	66.7%
Pitman Farms	P27389	Infantis	100.0%	100.0%
		Enteritidis	63.2%	0.0%
Perdue	P6058	Infantis	100.0%	100.0%
Perdue	P1318	Infantis	100.0%	100.0%
		Typhimurium	100.0%	100.0%
White Lake Foods	P48281	Infantis	100.0%	100.0%
		Typhimurium	100.0%	33.3%
Perdue	P19112	Infantis	100.0%	100.0%

Source: "Raw Poultry Sampling," USDA FSIS, accessed April 3, 2026; "Salmonella Risk in the U.S. Poultry Industry: When Infections Become More Severe and Harder to Treat," Farm Forward. Note: Throughout this report, plant-level FSIS figures labeled 2025 (contamination, serotype and resistance) cover FSIS fiscal year 2025 (October 1, 2024 to September 30, 2025).

Appendix D. Plant Overlap by Market (Any Raw Chicken Product, Any Cut)

Shaded rows = shared plant

No.	Market	Mainstream Retailer	365 Plants Found (Any Product Type)	Mainstream Plants Found (Any Product Type)	Shared Plant (Any Product Type)?	Shared Plant No.
1	Chicago, IL	Jewel-Osco	P1318, P2178	P2178, P7903, P9197	Y	P2178
2	Columbus, OH	Kroger Marketplace	P1318, P19112, P2178	P1243, P286	N	—
3	Kansas City, MO	Walmart	P1318, P19112, P2178	P1243, P1318, P19112	Y	P1318, P19112
4	Minneapolis, MN	Walmart	P1318, P19112	P19112	Y	P19112
5	Boston, MA	Walmart Supercenter	P1318, P19112	P1318, P2178, P7903, P9197	Y	P1318
6	Hingham, MA	Target	P1318, P19112, P2178, P48281, P8757	P1318, P7903, P9197	Y	P1318
7	New York, NY	Target	P1318, P2178, P48281, P8757	P1318, P2178, P7903, P9197	Y	P1318, P2178
8	Portland, ME	Hannaford	P1318, P19112, P2178, P48281	P9197	N	—
9	Providence, RI	Stop & Shop	P1318, P19112, P2178, P48281	P1243, P21234, P2178, P7903, P9197	Y	P2178
10	Arlington, VA	Target	P1318, P19112	P1318, P7903, P9197	Y	P1318
11	Baltimore, MD	Giant Food	P1318, P19112, P2178	P1318, P7903, P9197	Y	P1318
12	Philadelphia, PA	ShopRite	P1318, P2178, P48281	P2178, P7903, P9197	Y	P2178
13	Stamford, CT	Stop & Shop	P1318, P19112, P2178, P6058	P1243, P21234, P7903	N	—
14	Washington, DC	Giant Food	P1318, P19112, P2178, P48281, P8757	P1243, P7903, P9197	N	—
15	Atlanta, GA	Publix	P1318, P19112, P2178	P1243, P2178, P9197	Y	P2178
16	Charlotte, NC	Harris Teeter	P1318, P19112	P1318, P2178	Y	P1318
17	Miami, FL	Publix	P1318	P1243	N	—
18	Nashville, TN	Kroger	P1318, P19112, P2178, P48281, P8757	P1243, P2178, P7903, P9197	Y	P2178
19	New Orleans, LA	Walmart Supercenter	P1318, P19112, P2178	P2178, P9197	Y	P2178

Source: Farm Forward analysis of store audit photographs, 272 products (167 Whole Foods, 105 mainstream retailers) across 19 matched markets. Note: Columns list all distinct establishment numbers identified across any 365 or mainstream product at that store, regardless of product type or cut. A shared plant number means the two stores sourced from at least one common facility somewhere in their raw chicken offerings, not necessarily for the same product type. For overlap limited to matched product type/cut and production claim, see Appendix E "Plant Overlap by Market (Matched Product Type/Cut and Production Claim)."

Appendix E. Plant Overlap by Market (Matched Product Type/Cut and Production Claim)

No.	Market	Mainstream Retailer	Comparable Products with Same Plant	Shared Plant?	Shared Plant No.
1	Chicago, IL	Jewel-Osco	1 of 1	Y	P2178
2	Columbus, OH	Kroger Marketplace	No comparable product available	—	—
3	Kansas City, MO	Walmart	4 of 5	Y	P1318, P19112
4	Minneapolis, MN	Walmart	2 of 2	Y	P19112
5	Boston, MA	Walmart Supercenter	1 of 4	Y	P1318
6	Hingham, MA	Target	2 of 3	Y	P1318
7	New York, NY	Target	2 of 5	Y	P1318
8	Portland, ME	Hannaford	0 of 1	N	—
9	Providence, RI	Stop & Shop	0 of 3	N	—
10	Arlington, VA	Target	0 of 3	N	—
11	Baltimore, MD	Giant Food	0 of 2	N	—
12	Philadelphia, PA	ShopRite	0 of 2	N	—
13	Stamford, CT	Stop & Shop	0 of 1	N	—
14	Washington, DC	Giant Food	0 of 3	N	—
15	Atlanta, GA	Publix	0 of 1	N	—
16	Charlotte, NC	Harris Teeter	0 of 1	N	—
17	Miami, FL	Publix	No comparable product available	—	—
18	Nashville, TN	Kroger	1 of 3	Y	P2178
19	New Orleans, LA	Walmart Supercenter	1 of 3	Y	P2178

Source: Farm Forward analysis, 43 like-for-like product comparisons across 17 markets with an identically comparable product type/cut.

Appendix F. Price Comparison for Chicken Sourced from the Same Plant

Market	Product Type (Claim) — Plant	Mainstream Retailer	Mainstream Retailer $/lb	Whole Foods $/lb	Premium ($, %)
Minneapolis, MN	Bnls skinless thighs (Conv.) — P19112	Walmart	$3.94	$5.74	$1.80 (45.7%)
Hingham, MA	Bnls skinless thighs (Organic) — P1318	Target	$5.99	$7.99	$2.00 (33.4%)
Kansas City, MO	Bnls skinless thighs (Conv.) — P19112	Walmart	$4.33	$5.74	$1.41 (32.6%)
Hingham, MA	Bnls skinless breasts (Organic) — P1318	Target	$6.99	$8.99	$2.00 (28.6%)
Nashville, TN	Ground chicken (Conv.) — P2178	Kroger	$4.99	$5.99	$1.00 (20.0%)
New York, NY	Bnls skinless breasts (Organic) — P1318	Target	$7.14	$8.49	$1.35 (18.9%)
Kansas City, MO	Bnls skinless breasts (Organic) — P1318	Walmart	$6.74	$7.99	$1.25 (18.5%)
New York, NY	Bnls skinless thighs (Organic) — P1318	Target	$6.99	$7.99	$1.00 (14.3%)
Boston, MA	Bnls skinless thighs (Organic) — P1318	Walmart	$6.86	$7.74	$0.88 (12.8%)
Kansas City, MO	Bnls skinless thighs (Organic) — P1318	Walmart	$6.86	$7.74	$0.88 (12.8%)
Kansas City, MO	Bnls skinless breasts (Conv.) — P19112	Walmart	$5.42	$5.99	$0.57 (10.5%)
Minneapolis, MN	Bnls skinless breasts (Conv.) — P19112	Walmart	$5.40	$5.74	$0.34 (6.3%)
Chicago, IL	Ground chicken (Conv.) — P2178	Jewel-Osco	$5.99	$5.99	$0.00 (0.0%)

Note: Where a store carried more than one package of a given product type and production claim from the same plant, the price shown is the mean of those packages. Nine of the 13 comparisons involve at least one such average; the remaining four compare a single package on each side. Per-package prices are on file. Prices are those printed on the package, unadjusted for promotions or loyalty pricing.

Appendix G. Methodology

Sampling

During the week of August 3, 2026, Farm Forward audited 365-brand raw chicken at 30 stores across the country: five stores in each of Whole Foods' six U.S. sales regions, spanning urban, suburban, and small-city locations in 25 states, including Washington D.C. For the purposes of this report, a market refers to a specific Whole Foods store paired with a nearby mainstream retailer carrying comparable products in the same general geographic area, not a region as a whole. We captured photographs for every distinct 365-brand raw chicken product type available at each store, including boneless skinless breasts, tenderloins, boneless skinless and bone-in thighs, wings, whole birds, and ground chicken, and included both organic and non-organic products in our sample. We refer to this organic/conventional distinction throughout the report as a product's "production claim."

For each product, we identified the processing plant using the USDA establishment number printed on the package, then cross-referenced that number against two FSIS datasets: the agency's salmonella performance standards that classify plants according to their level of contamination, and its salmonella surveillance data, which documents which serotypes are found in positive samples and whether those samples are resistant to 17 different antibiotics important to human medicine. Establishment numbers that were blurry, ambiguous, or inconsistent with FSIS's plant registry were investigated further; those that could not be confirmed were removed. Some packages carried two establishment numbers—a downstream processor in the lot code and the slaughter plant in the USDA mark of inspection. Where the mark of inspection was legible we recorded the slaughter plant; where it was not, the product was excluded.

Of the 394 products we photographed, 352 had a usable plant number and were included in our analysis (247 from Whole Foods, 105 from mainstream retailers in the same markets). The remaining 42 were excluded: 25 with establishment numbers too blurry to confirm, 14 with no usable photograph, and 3 with no establishment number on the package.

Supplementary Online Check

As a limited supplementary check on whether in-store sourcing extends to online sales, we separately ordered two 365-brand conventional chicken parts products through Amazon.com in two markets: Portland, OR (traced to Perdue's Mount Vernon, WA plant—P6058) and Chicago, IL (traced to Perdue's Cromwell, KY plant—P19112). Both plants were already identified in Figure 1 as suppliers of in-store 365-brand chicken. This sample is too small to generalize from on its own and is excluded from all percentages, figures, and the primary 247-product sample discussed elsewhere in the report.

Mainstream Retailer Audit

Because so many of these contaminated plants supplying 365-brand chicken turned out to be Perdue-owned, we conducted a second audit using the same parameters during the same week, identifying 19 nearby mainstream national and regional retailer

locations—including Walmart, Target, Kroger, Giant, Publix, Jewel-Osco, Stop & Shop, ShopRite, Harris Teeter, and Hannaford—selling Perdue or Perdue's Harvestland-brand chicken in the same markets. To ensure comparability, we selected mainstream retailers located close geographically to each Whole Foods store (often within a mile or two).

Our mainstream retailer audit was limited to 19 stores because, in two of Whole Foods' sales regions (California, which includes Hawaii, and the Central West region, which includes Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming), Perdue raw chicken products were largely unavailable (accounting for 10 of 30 stores). An eleventh Whole Foods-only market, Pittsburgh, PA, brings the total to 11 Whole Foods-only markets and 19 matched pairs (30 total) for a different reason than the California and Central West stores: its matched conventional retailer visit could not be completed due to Perdue products being out of stock.

Matching and Price Comparison

At each location, we recorded the price per pound for each raw chicken product photographed. Our capture protocol prioritized the shelf-tag price where one was legible in the photograph, followed by the per-pound price printed on the package, followed by total package price divided by package weight. In practice, shelf tags were not consistently legible in the audit photographs, and 336 of the 352 products in our final dataset were priced from the per-pound figure printed on the package, with the remaining 16 priced by total-price-divided-by-weight or lacking a usable price. Because package-printed prices are set at packing rather than at the register, they reflect pre-promotion pricing and do not account for temporary sales, discounts, or loyalty-program pricing that may have applied at either store on the day of our visit. Where a store carried more than one package of the same product type and production claim from the same plant, we averaged those packages to produce a single store price for that product, and all figures in Appendix F reflect that convention.

We assessed plant overlap between Whole Foods and mainstream retailers along two metrics: at the retailer level (whether a Whole Foods store and its paired mainstream retailer sourced any raw chicken product from a common plant, regardless of product type/cut) and at the product level (whether the identical product type/cut and production claim was sourced from the identical plant at both stores). The product-level match is the more conservative measure and the one underlying our price comparisons.

Of the 19 matched markets, 17 had at least one identical product type/cut and production claim available at both the Whole Foods and the mainstream retailer (Columbus, OH, and Miami, FL, had no comparable product). Across those 17 markets, we identified 43 product pairings; 14 were sourced from the same plant, and 13 of those had usable price information at both stores. These 13 pairings form the basis of the price comparison in Appendix F.

We treat "same plant" as a valid basis for product comparison for three reasons. First, the food-safety findings in this report—contamination rate, serotype, and antibiotic resistance—are determined by conditions inside the processing plant, not on the originating farm. FSIS assigns category ratings at the plant level because cross-contamination between birds from different farms typically occurs on the

slaughter line. Second, every comparison in Appendix F matches not only the plant but the production claim (organic to organic, conventional to conventional). Third, the birds themselves are typically the same breed: 365-brand chicken is certified under GAP's tiered welfare program, which does not require slower-growing breeds at the tier where it is certified, suggesting that 365-brand chicken is generally the same conventional fast-growing breeds used industry-wide (with rare exceptions—one product in our sample was labeled GAP Step 4, a tier that does require slower-growing breeds, though it was not among the products included in our price comparison; see "Paying for a Pledge Whole Foods Never Kept" for a full accounting).

"Production claim," as used throughout this report, refers only to organic-versus-conventional status and does not reflect GAP tier or other welfare certifications (see "Limitations" below for what our field data show about GAP labeling on each side of these comparisons).

Limitations

An establishment number identifies only where a bird was slaughtered and processed; it discloses nothing about the farm that raised the bird or the conditions under which they were raised. Farm Forward requested farm-level traceability information from Whole Foods for each product and plant in our sample; Whole Foods was not able to provide this information, citing its "Statement on Broiler Chicken Welfare" page on the company website,[53] which provides no specific farm information. We cannot verify that a 365-brand bird and a mainstream-brand bird processed at the same plant were raised on the same farm or under the same conditions. This is a limit on what this report, or any outside researcher working from public and packaging data, can establish.

Four California packages carrying a P6402A processing code could not be traced to a slaughter establishment from the available photographs and were excluded from our sample. Perdue's Mount Vernon, WA plant (P6058) is the most likely source, since it slaughters for the facility that code identifies and supplied the other nine P6402A packages we recorded. Had all four been assigned to P6058, that plant's share of our sample would rise from 12.6 to 13.9 percent, and the share of products from plants failing an FSIS standard in at least one product class from 27.1 to 28.3 percent. No finding in this report would change.

A related limitation applies to welfare-tier labeling. Our price and product-type matching controlled for plant, product type/cut, and organic-or-conventional status, but not for GAP certification or other welfare claims. In our field audit, GAP Step 2 or Step 3 labeling appeared on the substantial majority of 365-brand packages recorded, while no GAP or comparable welfare-tier labeling was found on any of the matched mainstream-retailer products. This labeling difference is real, but it does not reflect a difference in breed or in plant-level food safety. GAP Steps 2 and 3 require some added space and enrichment on the farm, but at the tier where 365-brand chicken is certified, GAP does not require slower-growing breeds or any practice that would change the food-safety profile of the chicken coming out of those plants.

53 "Statement on Broiler Chicken Welfare," Whole Foods Market, accessed September 15, 2026. Note: We also include the link to this page captured on the Wayback Machine Internet Archive in the event that Whole Foods removes or edits this page at a later date.

Author & Acknowledgments

Farm Forward was founded in 2007 as the nation's first nonprofit devoted exclusively to ending factory farming. We are a team of strategists, campaigners, and thought leaders guiding the movement to change the way our world eats and farms. More information about Farm Forward's work and our other publications can be found at farmforward.com.

This report was written by: Dr. Kathryn Gillespie

Farm Forward's VP of Research and Strategy, Dr. Gillespie received her PhD from the University of Washington in Human Geography and is the author of two books, including *The Cow with Ear Tag #1389*.

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