

NEWS RELEASE



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FACTORY FARMED CHICKEN IN DECLINE - CONSUMERS
ASKED TO VOTE FOR THE WORST LABEL

Higher welfare chicken sales continue to soar, despite the credit crunch and misleading supermarket labels, according to data commissioned by Compassion in World Farming. Now, in an effort to galvanise consumers further, the public is being asked to vote on the most misleading chicken label in UK supermarkets.

Together with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and the Chicken Out! campaign Compassion in World Farming hopes clear labelling will push this increase in higher welfare chicken sales even further.

Between December 2007 and December 2008 free-range chicken sales alone have grown by 35 per cent, with growth of 42 per cent for higher welfare chicken meat (including higher welfare indoor systems). The survey from independent retail analysts TNS was commissioned by Compassion in World Farming. Results showed that sales of standard fresh chicken have been decreasing steadily over the last year. In December 2008 consumption of standard chicken (by volume) dropped by 11 per cent compared to the previous year.

The survey shows that in 2008 the growth in the market for chicken meat in major UK supermarkets was down to sales of higher welfare products, with the standard range registering an overall loss. For example, in December 2008 the sales value of Tesco's standard chicken was 55 per cent lower than in the corresponding period in the previous year.

Dr Lesley Lambert, Director of Research and Food Policy for Compassion in World Farming comments: "The TNS figures clearly show that consumers care about animal welfare and are ready to pay a little bit more for that, even during our difficult financial times. Campaigns like Chicken Out! have brought the issue under the spotlight and helped to raise awareness.

However, 82 per cent of fresh chicken meat still comes from chickens farmed indoors in intensive systems. Labels which sell factory farmed chickens disguised as “natural” or “farm fresh” products can trick consumers into buying poor welfare meat.”

Hugh’s Chicken Out! Launches poll for worst label

Compassion in World Farming has joined Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and the Chicken Out! campaign to launch a new initiative to ensure honest labelling. Coinciding with “Chickens, Hugh and Tesco, too” on Channel 4, the so-called ‘Label Watch’ competition will be launched on Monday 26 January and will give consumers the possibility to vote the worst chicken label among a selection from UK food retailers. The voting system will be web based and available on <http://www.chickenout.tv/label-debate.html>. Voting will close on 1 February 2009.

Dr Lesley Lambert, Director of Research and Food Policy for Compassion in World Farming says: “Despite consumers’ determination to purchase higher welfare chicken, some major supermarkets are not keeping up. The reality is that most of the chicken meat sold in our supermarkets comes from chickens which are intensively reared, with scientific studies showing more than a quarter suffer lameness, alongside other major welfare issues such as sudden death syndrome, lung and heart difficulties.”

“However, some food retailers are on a good path: all fresh chicken in The Co-operative, M&S and Waitrose is higher welfare, while Sainsbury’s has committed to moving all their chicken to higher welfare and has just announced that all their Taste the Difference chicken will be free range.”

“Since 2004, eggs boxes must be labelled with the production method. This has led to a move away from caged eggs. This scheme should be extended to chicken meat.”

END

Notes on TNS survey -Full briefing available upon request-

Compassion in World Farming commissioned data on fresh chicken meat sales (whole birds and portions) for the twelve-month period to 28th December 2008. Data was provided from independent retail analysts TNS on 23rd January 2009.

- TNS data for “higher welfare” refers to higher welfare indoor, organic and free-range chicken meat (whole fresh chicken and portions) sold in the major UK supermarkets: Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury’s, Morrisons, Somerfield, Waitrose, The Co-operative and Marks and Spencer.

- 'Higher welfare indoor' chicken production refers to production methods which use lower stocking densities and environmental enrichment and may include other modifications such as natural light and use of slower growing breeds of chicken.
- Following Channel 4 Food Week in January 2008, consumers increased purchasing of higher welfare products, with growth in sales continuing throughout 2008.
- In December 2008 consumers spent 25% more on higher welfare chicken than in December 2007.
- In December 2008 spending on standard chicken was almost 20% down on spending at the same time in the previous year.
- In December 2008 consumption of higher welfare chicken (by volume) was 27% higher than at the same time in the previous year and there was an 11% drop in consumption of standard chicken compared to the previous year.
- At Tesco, the major area of sustained growth throughout the year has been in the higher welfare chicken market (free range, organic and 'standard plus' which corresponds to higher welfare indoor production). In December 2008, according to TNS, the sales value of standard chicken at Tesco was 55% lower (24% lower by volume) than in the corresponding period in the previous year whilst sales value of higher welfare indoor chicken was 45% higher (51% by volume) and sales of free range chicken were 15% higher by value, 21% by volume.

Notes on Label Watch poll

-Picture of hock burns available upon request-

- Hock burns explained: intensively farmed broiler (meat) chickens are usually kept in barren sheds with no natural light. There is litter (e.g. woodshavings) on the floor to absorb droppings; litter remains in the sheds for the birds' 5-6 week lifetime and is not usually cleared until the chickens are slaughtered. Regular contact with soiled litter can lead to burns on the birds' hocks from excreta in the litter.
- A recent picture of a chicken with hock burns, taken from a UK supermarket within the last week, is available in high resolution upon request.
- The poll is available at <http://www.chickenout.tv/label-debate.html>
- Compassion in World Farming's label guidelines available at http://www.ciwf.org.uk/your_food/know_your_labels/default.aspx

For the full briefing, photos, more information or interviews contact Valentina Moressa, Compassion in World Farming, on 01483 521952 or out of hours 07771 926005 or valentina@ciwf.org