

Jewish Animal Ethics

Nonhuman animals are a vital part of our ecosystems and communities, and they awaken in us a wonder at the world around us. Like us, they feel pleasure and pain, joy and emotional distress. As Jews, we've inherited a tradition that has numerous beautiful insights about animal life and, from the time of the ancient rabbis, Jewish law has offered detailed advice on how to treat farmed animals ethically based on the Jewish principle of compassion for animals, *tza'ar ba'alei chayim*.

Unfortunately, modern methods of factory farming animals have changed the world of farming so much that it is hard to know how to apply past wisdom. Agriculture has changed more in the last century than in the last millennium. In the past, the greatest welfare problems were at the time of slaughter; now the greatest welfare problems are had on the farm, where kosher law has little to say. This leaves all of us with an exciting task: perhaps like no other generation, we have the opportunity to rethink what it means to treat farmed animals ethically!

WHAT IS WELFARE?

Minimally, animal welfare requires maintaining appropriate standards for accommodation, feeding, disease prevention and treatment, freedom of movement, and the ability to express natural behaviors. As Jews, the Torah mitzvah and moral imperative of *tza'ar ba'alei chayim* calls upon us to provide animals with thoughtful care and protection that attends to both their physical and mental well-being, whether on the level of the individual, or on the level of whole groups or species.

SEEING FOR OURSELVES

By visiting the farms that raise and slaughter the animals we eat, we can see for ourselves how they are raised. Unfortunately, visiting animal farms and slaughterhouses is not nearly as easy as seeing crop production. Often farms and slaughter plants are located far away, and, even if they were next door, the overwhelming majority of animal farms don't allow people to visit.

The good news is that we do have a way to "see" how animals are treated on farms through higher-welfare certifications or buying from retailers that enforce their own welfare standards (more info below). And, in any

case, unless you have considerable expertise in animal husbandry, a certification is usually a faster and more accurate way to find out about welfare than attempting a farm field trip. Another important window into the everyday life of animals on industrial farms comes from the work of undercover investigations by groups like the Humane Society of the United States--just google and see what you find.

WHAT ABOUT KOSHER MEAT?

Frustratingly, the overwhelming majority of kosher animals are raised in the same factory farm conditions in which most other farmed animals are raised. A kosher certification does not typically mean that animals were spared standard inhumane practices like the caging of egg-laying hens, the inhumane handling of cattle in transport and before slaughter, or the use of hybrid chicken and turkey genetics that cause the animals to grow so fast that they suffer from unusual diseases and often have pain even when walking. Even worse, it is harder to locate higher welfare kosher food because the most reliable animal welfare certification programs presently will only certify operations that stun animals pre-slaughter, and contemporary kosher authorities have typically disallowed this stunning.

The good news is that until welfare certifications are more available on kosher meats, ethical kosher meat retailers have stepped in to provide us information about how animals are raised, and plant-based meat analogues available in most every grocery store are typically certified kosher. Grow and Behold and Kol Foods supply poultry, beef, and other meat products nationally, commit themselves to higher welfare standards, and are transparent about their farming practices (not all their products meet the same level of welfare, so ask to find out what's right for you). Other more humane meats are locally and regionally available, like Teva Beef located in California and distributing at Trader Joe's locations throughout the western United States.

HIGHER-WELFARE CERTIFIERS AND PLANT-BASED ALTERNATIVES

If you're not buying kosher meats, there are already nationally available products with welfare certifications that allow you to "see" how animals are treated. For more detailed information on these certifiers see the following chart.

	BETTER WELFARE CERTIFIERS		BEST WELFARE CERTIFIERS			
CERTIFIER	Certified Humane (no addendum, "cage free," or "free range")	Global Animal Partnership (GAP) Steps 2-3	Global Animal Partnership (GAP) Steps 4-5+	American Grassfed Certified (AGC)	Certified Humane (with "pasture-raised" addendum)	Animal Welfare Approved (AWA)
STANDARDS	http://certifiedhumane.org/how-we-work/our-standards/	http://www.globalanimalpartnership.org/5-step-program/standards		http://www.american-grassfed.org/about-us/our-standards/	http://certifiedhumane.org/how-we-work/our-standards/	http://animal-welfareapproved.org/standards/list-of-standards/
APPLICABLE ANIMALS AND PRODUCTS	Cattle (beef, dairy, calves), Chickens (broiler + laying hens/eggs), Sheep, Goats, Pigs, Turkeys, Bison	Cattle (beef), Broiler chickens, Pigs, Turkeys, Sheep, Goats, Bison		Cattle and other ruminants	Cattle (beef, dairy, calves), Chickens (broiler + laying hens/eggs), Sheep, Goats, Pigs, Turkeys, Bison	Cattle (beef, dairy, calves), Chickens (broiler + laying hens/eggs), Sheep (dairy + meat), Goats (dairy + meat), Pigs, Turkeys, Ducks, Geese, Bison

Another way to avoid supporting intensively raised farmed animal systems is to rely instead on widely available plant-based meat, dairy, and egg alternatives. Most of these products carry kosher certifications. Find out more on page 17: Food from Farmed Animals.

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN PROMOTE MORE HUMANE CONSUMPTION:

- Perhaps the single best thing you can do is work to create ethical food policies that reflect your institution's values around tza'ar ba'alei chayim.
- Promote vegan and higher-welfare products for your kiddush, such as AWA-approved egg brands.
- Start a monthly community potluck where high-welfare products and new vegan recipes are featured.
- Ask caterers to use higher-welfare animal products and integrate vegan options into their menus.
- Hold a film screening or educational program on the issues that face animals in an industrial farming system.
- Organize a cooking class that teaches community members how to cook heritage chicken or vegetarian and vegan food.
- Take a community field trip to a farm animal sanctuary to learn about the day-to-day needs of the animals we raise for food.

Food From Farm Animals

ANIMAL MATTERS

Eating lower on the food chain (eating fewer animals and animal products) reduces stress on the environment and can be better for personal health, not to mention animal welfare. Customer demand for cheap food doesn't stop with vegetables: in fact, meat, dairy and eggs are one of the largest components of the commercial agricultural system. As with "organics," there are a lot of terms used to describe feeding and handling practices used. It's important to understand these terms when you're considering what eggs to use for your egg salad, cream to use in your coffee, and meat to serve (or not serve) at a special event.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States (FAO), 56 billion animals (not including fish) are slaughtered globally each year in the meat, dairy, and egg industries. Most of these animals are raised in conventional, industrial agriculture systems known as factory farms or, less commonly, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs). While these systems are designed to maximize productivity and profit for the producer, they create serious welfare problems for animals. Below you'll find a species by species guide of what you need to know to make food choices that better fit your values.

LIVES OF ANIMALS

Cattle Raised for Dairy:

All cows typically live together in herds and on grasslands, where they spend most of their time grazing. They form strong friendships and family bonds, and recent science has shown that, like in humans, their stress levels (interpreted from heart rates) are lowered when around a preferred partner as compared with a random individual. Although very social animals, most of today's dairy cows live in confined operations where they have limited or no movement, socialization, or access to the outdoors. The dairy cow of today has been artificially and genetically selected to produce up to 12 times the amount of milk needed to feed her calf. Low-welfare breeding practices lead to lameness and other painful conditions in dairy cows, who are slaughtered after 3-4 pregnancy cycles. By contrast, in a traditional pastoral system, a dairy cow's life span could reach 25 years or more.

Like humans, dairy cows produce milk as a result of pregnancy and giving birth. Female calves are typically kept for dairy production, while males are taken away from their mother at a young age and are slaughtered at 16-18 weeks. While some veal farmers allow calves to live in groups, many confine calves to small, solitary stalls where they cannot explore, groom, exercise, or bond with other animals—behaviors crucial for natural development. Calves typically suffer from disease and high levels of stress during their short lives. Because of this, high-welfare certification programs such as Animal Welfare Approved do not certify veal operations.

Cows are routinely fed growth hormones to increase their milk production. The effects of these hormones on people are not fully known, but many people seek to avoid them. The dairy industry has also seen massive consolidation, with low milk prices causing the near collapse of a once-thriving family farm sector in the Northeast. Buying milk from "grass-fed" or "pasture-raised" cows "never treated with rBST" means that you're avoiding extra hormones, and supporting farmers who are taking good care of their animals.

There are higher-welfare alternatives to conventional dairy products and higher-welfare certifications to look for; see appendices II and III.

Interested in dairy alternatives? We are lucky to live in a time where plant-based (e.g., soy, almond, coconut, flax) milk and other dairy alternatives (for yogurt, cheese, ice creams, dips, and spreads) are widely available in many major and smaller stores across the country.

Cattle Raised for Beef:

Most cattle raised for beef start their lives on the range and are allowed to graze and socialize, making their experience much better in comparison to other conventionally raised farm animals. However, almost all cattle spend approximately the last six months of life in feedlots, where they are fattened on grain and kept in dirty, crowded, unnatural conditions. Also, conventional cattle systems allow for painful mutilations, such as dehorning, branding, and sometimes tail docking (although this is typically associated with dairy farming)—all without the use of anesthetics or analgesics.

Food From Farm Animals

Conventionally-raised meat cows are routinely fed hormones to increase their growth rates. They are raised in feedlots with thousands of other cows, in conditions that promote disease. To combat this, preventative antibiotics are added to their food. This overuse of antibiotics stimulates the creation of antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria, reducing the drug's effectiveness in treating human illness.

The environmental effects of large-scale animal agriculture are huge. While cow manure can fertilize a well-managed pasture, creating a balanced closed-loop ecosystem, manure from cows raised in feedlots has nowhere to go. Giant sewage lagoons of animal waste pollute waterways and cause unpleasant odors for miles around.

There are higher-welfare alternatives to conventional beef products and higher-level certifications to look for: see appendix.

Want to nix the beef and eat it, too? Increasingly, there are plant-based "beef" products that simulate the taste and texture of beef like never before.

Laying Hens and Chickens Raised for Meat:

All chickens are originally from the jungle. They are omnivores who like to scratch in the dirt for bugs and "dust bathe," which is how they stay cool and clean. Research has shown chickens to have complex and well-ordered social structures. They also have the ability to exercise self-control, anticipate the future, and to adjust and tailor their communication to different individuals. Despite what we now know about chickens' and other birds' sophisticated and complex cognitive capacities, these animals suffer more in conventional systems than any other animal.

Traditional breeding of birds for meat and egg production used to occur by carefully selecting healthy males and females and allowing them to mate. Offspring would then possess characteristics similar to their parent birds. These healthy lines are now known as "standard-bred" or "heritage." With the rise of hybrid breeding, highly controlled confinement systems, feed supplements, and subtherapeutic antibiotic use, welfare concerns have yielded to profitability. Many birds in conventional systems suffer from painful abnormalities as a result of their genetics, and are kept in overcrowded conditions with poor air quality and no

natural light. They rarely or never have enough room and opportunity to run, fly, stretch, flap their wings, or express other natural behaviors. Even when given the space, many of these animals are now bred to grow so large so quickly that they often cannot walk, let alone run, without pain.

Fortunately, there are tools to find higher-welfare alternatives. BuyingPoultry.com is an excellent resource for consumers, providing information about every legally regulated welfare claim as well as ethical ratings for different products. For more information about higher welfare certifications for poultry and eggs: see appendix.

And for those who want to have their meat and not worry about how animals are treated, there is a new generation of plant-based meat analogues to chicken that are increasingly difficult to distinguish from the original.

Farmed Fish:

Fish farming, a form of aquaculture where fish are raised in human-made enclosures either on land or within natural bodies of water, is the fastest-growing area of animal food production. Salmon, tuna, cod, trout, and halibut are among the most commonly farmed species. Although fish farming is often portrayed as taking the burden off of overexploited wild fish populations, these farms can severely damage ecosystems by introducing diseases, pollutants, and invasive species. Farms often depend on wild fish lower on the food chain - like anchovies - to feed larger carnivorous farmed species, and the overfishing wrought on these populations can have disastrous repercussions.

Like with farmed land animals, farmed fish live in crowded and cramped conditions and may suffer from lesions and debilitating injuries. Stressful conditions cause disease and parasite outbreaks, like sea lice, that farmers respond to with pesticides and antibiotics. These treatment measures promote resistant strains of diseases that can harm both wild fish populations and humans who eat the farmed fish. While there are tools to learn about the ecological impacts of fishing and aquaculture--we especially recommend SeafoodWatch.org and the [Marine Stewardship Council](http://MarineStewardshipCouncil.org) there are no regulations to ensure the humane treatment and slaughter of fish raised on aquafarms or those harvested from our oceans.