

Chick-fil-A to Serve Antibiotic-Free Chicken

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NEW YORK (AP) — [Chick-fil-A](#) [1] said Tuesday it plans to serve only chicken raised without antibiotics within the next five years.

The Atlanta-based chain said it's working with suppliers to build up an adequate supply for its nearly 1,800 restaurants. It is asking suppliers to work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture to verify that no antibiotics are administered on the chickens at any point.

The use of antibiotics to fatten up farm animals and prevent disease has become a growing concern in recent years. The Food and Drug Administration has warned to decrease antibiotics in meat because the practice could lead to the growth of antibiotic-resistant germs.

Many consumers simply don't like the idea of eating meat that has been fed antibiotics, and serving meat raised without antibiotics can be a selling point for companies.

Tim Tassopoulos, Chick-fil-A's executive vice president of operations, said in a phone interview that the company planned to keep customers updated on its progress and eventually advertise its conversion in its restaurants.

"We're going to make sure customers know," he said.

Chick-fil-A isn't the first chain to tout meat raised without antibiotics. Chipotle, which has surged in popularity in recent years, has also made its commitment to "responsibility raised" meat an integral part of its identity. Supply issues have forced the Mexican food chain to use conventionally raised meat at times, most notably for beef. For chicken, Chipotle says less than 1 percent of its meat was conventionally raised last year.

Meanwhile, Tassopoulos says that the switch to chickens raised without antibiotics would likely result in higher prices for customers, but said the company is working with suppliers to ensure the impact is "minimal."

Chick-fil-A said its conversion will require "changes along every point of the supply chain — from the hatchery to the processing plant." The company's suppliers include Tyson, Purdue and Pilgrim's Pride.

Rob Dugas, vice president of Chick-fil-A's supply chain, said that suppliers weren't surprised by the request given recent consumer trends. But he said it would still take them some time to make the necessary changes.

Paul Shapiro, a spokesman for the Humane Society of the United States, said that

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Chick-fil-A's decision was a positive step on the public health front. In terms of animal welfare, however, he noted that the use of antibiotics is a "minor" factor affecting the conditions in which the chickens are raised.

Shapiro said one of the biggest problems from an animal welfare perspective is that birds are genetically selected to grow as fat as possible as quickly as possible.

Chick-fil-A, based in Atlanta, operates locations in 39 states and Washington, D.C.

In a statement, the National Chicken Council said the chicken industry works to ensure that no matter which production system consumers choose, "they can have confidence in the safety and nutrition of all of their chicken purchases."

Spokesman Tom Super also said breeding practices have helped "raise a better chicken" while improving its welfare.

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AP Health Writer Matthew Perrone contributed from Washington, D.C.

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