Consumer Trends: Chicken-Eaters Want More 'Humanely Raised' Meat

ASPCA

NEW YORK (PRNewswire-USNewswire) — As the poultry industry kicks off its annual month-long celebration of chicken this September, the ASPCA [1]® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®), as part of its national "Truth About Chicken [2]" campaign, is announcing the findings of a national survey* that reveals a distrust of the chicken industry among consumers and a strong desire for more humanely raised chicken choices at the grocery store.

In the U.S., chicken eclipses every other alternative as the most frequently eaten meat, with chicken consumption rising by 17 percent[1] last year, according to the National Chicken Council. While a majority of Americans eat chicken, the newly released survey conducted by Edge Research, Inc. and commissioned by the ASPCA reveals that consumers are very concerned with how chickens are treated on the farm.

The ASPCA's survey found that more than 80 percent of respondents feel it's important that the chickens they eat be humanely raised. Yet, less than a third of respondents trust the companies that make chicken products to treat their chickens in a humane fashion.

Humane treatment of chickens raised for meat is more than just a moral imperative. Seventy-eight percent of chicken consumers surveyed feel that raising chickens humanely leads to safer chicken products, and more than 75 percent of chicken consumers surveyed wish there were more humanely-raised chicken options available at their local grocery stores.

"Concern for farm animal welfare is increasing – Americans want to know the chicken they eat has been raised in a humane environment, both for the birds' sakes and for their own health," said Matt Bershadker, president and CEO of the ASPCA. "The more these concerns are raised, the closer we'll come to a time when farm animals are not abused, nor our health potentially imperiled, in the name of cheaper dinners and higher profits."

The vast majority of the nearly 9 billion chickens raised for meat – or "broiler" chickens – each year in the U.S. are kept in overcrowded, artificially-lit sheds and are selectively bred to grow to heavier weights faster than ever. As a consequence, many birds spend much of their lives lying in their own waste and unable to express natural behaviors. These stressful, sickening conditions increase birds' susceptibility to disease as well as the amount of contaminated fecal matter they carry to the slaughterhouse, which can raise the risk of foodborne illness reaching consumers[2]. Chicken already causes more foodborne illness than any other meat, and a 2006 study by university researchers, including those from University of

Minnesota and Iowa State University, found that a 1 percent increase in chicken illness could create a 4 percent increase in human illness attributed to chicken[3].

Consolidation of the chicken industry has placed the production of chicken in the hands of a few large companies, resulting in very little variety in the type of chicken the average American can buy or order in a restaurant. During National Chicken Month, the ASPCA is raising awareness [3] about the serious issue of broiler chicken welfare and encouraging consumers to tell their grocers they want access to more humanely raised chicken options. Consumers can do this by filling out an online form at www.TruthAboutChicken.org [4]. The ASPCA is also providing a downloadable label guide [5] to help consumers decode the current litany of confusing labels on meat, dairy and egg products.

"It's incredibly important that concerned consumers share their desire for more humane chicken options," said Suzanne McMillan, senior director for the ASPCA's Farm Animal Welfare Program. "We need fundamental changes in the way we raise chickens for meat to alleviate the needless suffering of billions of birds and create safer food options for Americans."

The ASPCA launched The Truth About Chicken campaign to increase knowledge and spur reform around the breeding practices and living conditions of the nearly 9 billion chickens raised for their meat each year in the U.S. The ASPCA advocates for raising chickens with more balanced growth in better conditions, which will result in healthier birds with overall higher welfare. Learn more and take action to help chickens by visiting TruthAboutChicken.org [6].

*The ASPCA designed this survey and it was conducted via phone by Edge Research, Inc. between August 14 and 17, 2014. The sample of 1,009 adults included 609 respondents that were reached via landline and 400 respondents reached on cell phones, and a total of 729 consumers who purchase or order chicken products. The data are weighted slightly to ensure it is representative of the general population nationwide. The margin of error for the total sample of chicken consumers is +/- 3.6 percentage points.

About the ASPCA®
Founded in 1866, the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®) is the first animal welfare organization in North America and serves as the nation's leading voice for animals. More than two million supporters strong, the ASPCA's mission is to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States. As a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, the ASPCA is a national leader in the areas of anti-cruelty, community outreach and animal health services. For more information, please visit www.ASPCA.org [7], and be sure to follow the ASPCA on Facebook [8], Twitter [9], and Pinterest [10].

[1] National Chicken Council, Chicken Usage Summary, (2014)

[2] Reich, Felix et. al., The effects of Campylobacter numbers in caeca on the contamination of broiler carcasses with Campylobacter [11], Intl. Journal of Food Microbiology 127, 2008

[3] Singer, Randall et. al., Modeling the relationship between food animal health and human foodborne illness *[12], Preventive Veterinary Medicine 79, 2007*

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