



“Eating Animals”: Myths & Facts

A new documentary, *Eating Animals*, claims to address the question of where our meat, milk, poultry and eggs come from. Unfortunately, the film attempts to answer that question without including perspectives from modern farmers and ranchers or the organizations that represent them. The Animal Agriculture Alliance and the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance, along with the farmers, ranchers and other members of the agriculture community we represent, would like to take the opportunity to address some of the biggest myths perpetuated by this documentary.

Myth: Animal welfare is not a priority on large, modern farms.

- **Fact: Animal care has always been important to livestock and poultry producers – regardless of farm size.** According to USDA, 97 percent of U.S. farms are family-owned operations. Farm families take their ethical obligation to providing the best quality care to their animals very seriously. Animal safety, health and comfort are top priorities for farmers and ranchers, which include different types of housing, diet and overall management practices used to best raise animals for food.
- Animal care guidelines are in place across all sectors of the industry to help farmers, ranchers and processors improve the lives of the animals that depend on them. These guidelines are developed and continually updated with the help of scientists, veterinarians and animal welfare experts. As one example, the U.S. meat packing industry has worked with Temple Grandin, Ph.D. (who is featured in *Eating Animals*) since 1991 and she wrote the [Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines and Audit Guide](#).
- Other programs include:
 - The dairy industry’s [Farmers Assuring Responsible Management \(FARM\) program](#), which includes an on-farm animal well-being program and a third-party verification system.
 - The [Beef Quality Assurance \(BQA\) program](#), a nationally coordinated program providing cattle farmers and ranchers the principles, tools and education to ensure proper cattle care.
 - The [National Chicken Council Animal Welfare Guidelines](#), which are provided to members to assure the humane treatment of broiler chickens. These guidelines cover every phase of the chicken’s life and offer science-based recommendations for proper treatment.
 - The [United Egg Producers Certified program](#) that offers guidance for the well-being of egg-laying hens addressing animal handling, space and nutritional needs.

- The [National Turkey Federation's Animal Care Best Management Practices manual](#), first introduced in 1990, provides guidelines for appropriate care, handling and transportation.
- The [Pork Quality Assurance Plus](#) program, which provides guidelines for proper care to ensure swine-wellbeing. The program addresses caretaker training, space allocation and animal handling, among other topics.
- In addition to being the right thing to do, treating animals humanely also has well-documented economic benefits. Not only is humane handling ethically appropriate, it also offers distinct quality benefits in the form of better meat and poultry.
- One focus of the film was the structure of the U.S. poultry industry, with questions raised about its impacts on animal welfare and farm families. [The performance-based contract structure of modern poultry production](#) was instinctively designed to put the well-being of the birds as the top priority, as incentives are given to farmers who raise the healthiest birds, take risks and work hard. It incentivizes farmers to do their best, to compete, just like every other business in America or any other free market.

Myth: Farmers are not concerned about the environment.

- **Fact: For generations, farmers and ranchers across the country have raised animals not only in an ethical manner, but also in an environmentally sound and sustainable manner**, if for no other reason, to ensure that they can pass their farms on to the next generation. After all, farmers and ranchers breathe the same air and drink the same water as their neighbors.
- The film specifically focuses on the [environmental impact of the pork industry](#). The pork industry is the most highly regulated industry in all of agriculture. As responsible pork producers, they welcome inspections by the state every year to ensure compliance with strict environmental regulations. Farms are constantly improving operations, working closely with regulators, environmental organizations and scientists to improve these environmental management systems. In fact, farms owned by Smithfield and Murphy-Brown have been independently audited and certified as meeting all of the requirements set forth by the International Organization for Standards (ISO) for Environmental Management Systems.
- Agriculture is doing its part to continually improve in all regards. Take, for instance, the pork industry. Compared to 50 years ago, farmers are using less land and water to produce pork, and they are doing it with a smaller carbon footprint. Specifically, water use has been reduced by 41%, land use by 78%, and the carbon footprint by 35% per animal. The beef industry has also made significant improvements in sustainability. Over the past 30 years, the U.S. beef industry has cut the land needed to produce a pound of beef by 33%, the water required by 12% and the carbon footprint of a pound of beef has been reduced by 16%. In the 1940s, chickens required approximately 16 lbs. of feed to achieve a four lbs. bird weight; today the feed amount is less than seven lbs., and all without the use of hormones or steroids. The advances in the turkey industry are similar. Lower feed requirements also result in less fuel consumption and exhaust emissions by the tractors and trucks that bring grain to the market.

Myth: The animal agriculture community does not want consumers to see how animals are raised and how meat is produced.

- **Fact: Farm families are proactively working to increase transparency and showcase their daily work to provide the highest levels of animal care.** For example, consumers can visit [Fair Oaks Farms](#) in Indiana for a close-up look at modern dairy and hog farming. Many farmers are also active on social media and give followers daily updates about life on the farm. The Alliance has [a list available](#) of farmers who use social media to share information about farming and ranching.
- The North American Meat Institute has produced a “Glass Walls” video series that seeks to shine a light on the animal care and handling processes used in meat packing plants. The series, narrated by animal welfare expert Temple Grandin, features videos from lamb, beef, pork and turkey plants. The videos are available at www.animalhandling.org.
- The poultry industry was a major focus of this documentary. Chicken producers know it’s on them as an industry to do a better job of providing more information about how our food gets from farm to table. Food is an emotionally-charged topic, and with conflicting information available in documentaries like this, online and on social media, it’s understandable people are concerned. Through the industry’s [Chicken Check In](#) initiative - consumers can take as close of a look as they desire – at our birds, how they are raised, and how they get to our dinner tables. Additionally, the U.S. Poultry & Egg Association has produced a [Raising Chickens and Turkeys...for Today and Tomorrow](#) video that shows how chicken and turkeys are raised, starting from the hatchery and then at the farm. The National Turkey Federation has a series of videos and resources offering common-sense answers about raising healthy turkey flocks on family farms at [America’s Turkey Farmers website](#).

Myth: Antibiotic misuse is rampant within animal agriculture.

- **Fact: Antibiotics are an important tool in ensuring animal health and high standards of animal care. Farmers work closely with veterinarians to use antibiotics responsibly and provide consumers with safe food.** As of Jan. 1, 2017, antibiotics that are similar to those used in human medicine cannot legally be used to promote growth in food animals. The growth promotion uses of medically important antibiotics have been eliminated, and all remaining uses of these antibiotics in feed and water must be done under the supervision of a veterinarian. More about how farmers, veterinarians and FDA collaborated to make this significant change can be found at www.togetherabx.com.
- It is true that more antibiotics are used in animals than humans, but there are far more animals in the United States than people. There are more than 90 million cattle, 5.3 million sheep and lamb, 66 million hogs, 200 million turkeys and eight billion chickens on U.S. farms. The combined weight of livestock and poultry in the U.S. is roughly 3.5 times that of the combined weight of American men and women. A 1,200 pound steer is equal to roughly six men. If a steer needs treatment for pneumonia, logic will tell you that it will require a larger antibiotic dose than a person. Similarly, it is logical that our combined U.S. livestock and poultry herds and flocks will require more antibiotics by volume than our combined human population. And, keep in mind that a large percentage of antibiotics sold for animals have little to no human uses.

We hope that consumers with questions about animal agriculture will give the farmers and ranchers who dedicate their lives to caring for livestock and poultry the opportunity to answer them. For more information, we encourage you to check out the following resources.

- Animal Agriculture Alliance's [Advances in Animal Ag Report](#)
- U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance's SMART Farm [360 degrees video series](#)
- National Chicken Council's [Chicken CheckIn resources](#)
- National Cattlemen's Beef Association's [Rethink the Ranch videos](#)
- National Turkey Federation's [America's Turkey Farmers website](#)
- National Pork Board's [We Care initiative](#)
- U.S. Poultry and Egg Association's videos on [family vs. "factory" farming](#) and [Raising Chickens and Turkeys...for Today and Tomorrow](#)
- North American Meat Institute's [Meat MythCrushers](#)
- Dairy Management Inc.'s [DairyGood resources](#)
- United Egg Producers' [UEP Certified program](#)

About Animal Agriculture Alliance

The [Animal Agriculture Alliance](#) is an industry-united, nonprofit organization that helps bridge the communication gap between farm and fork. We **connect** key food industry stakeholders to arm them with responses to emerging issues. We **engage** food chain influencers and promote consumer choice by helping them better understand modern animal agriculture. We **protect** by exposing those who threaten our nation's food security with damaging misinformation.

About U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance® (USFRA®)

U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance (USFRA) is a coalition of farmer and rancher led organizations and agricultural partners, working to engage in dialogue with consumers who have questions about how today's food is grown and raised. USFRA is committed to continuous improvement and supporting U.S. farmers and ranchers' efforts to earn confidence and trust in today's agriculture. To learn more, visit our website at www.fooddialogues.com. You can also find USFRA on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).