

# Shopping for Humanely-Raised Food | Earth911.com

## Shopping for Humanely-Raised Food



This article is the fourth in a [six-part series](#) focused on helping consumers choose products that align with their values.

Of all the products consumers routinely buy, few are as fraught with moral and ecological quandaries as meat. While eschewing animal products entirely is one way to sidestep those issues, it's a major lifestyle change that only [one or two percent](#) of Americans have already made.

Even so, a recent [consumer survey](#) found that animal cruelty was the second highest issue of concern (behind "[non-toxic](#)") for American shoppers. "antibiotic and hormone-free," which relates to industrial farming practices, ranked third. "free range/cage-free" also made the list, indicating that even the most-eaten animal earns a bit of compassion from conscious shoppers.

There are many [resources](#) available for aspiring vegans, including the [Certified Vegan](#) labeling system. This article is for the 98 percent of shoppers who continue to buy animal products but want to minimize their harm to other species.

### Regulated Food Labels

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulates [meat labeling](#) in the U.S. Many of the legally defined terms have to do with preparation methods and relate more to [food safety](#) and quality than animal welfare standards. But people who buy meat should familiarize themselves with the definitions of [terms](#) like "no antibiotics" and "no hormones," which are significant to both food safety and animal well-being.

"Free range" and "free roaming," labels require producers to demonstrate to the USDA that poultry has access to the outdoors. However, these labels do not guarantee that the birds have actually spent any significant time outside.

"Cage free" [only applies to eggs](#) because chickens grown for their meat aren't kept in cages. A growing number of states have made cage-free the law. For example, [Washington state](#) now bans the sale of eggs from caged hens and requires hens be provided with

scratch areas, perches, nest areas, and dust bathing areas.



Cage-free doesn't mean the chickens get to go outside. Image: Adobe Stock

### Third-Party Food Labels

Third-party certification systems generally combine food safety and animal welfare standards. According to the Environmental Working Group, the [most reliable](#) humane certification systems are:

Each of these systems has its own standards, which may prioritize animal welfare, environmental impact, or human health benefits.

If your primary concern is the well-being of animals, you'll want to know that [Animal Welfare Approved](#) is one of only two certifications that require animals to be raised primarily outdoors (the other is [Global Animal Partnership](#), steps 4 and 5).

### Product Testing

Even many meat eaters draw the line at using animals for product safety testing, particularly luxury products like cosmetics.

Cosmetics and personal care products are very loosely regulated, which means that most product [safety claims](#) as well as claims such as "Cruelty-Free" or "Not Tested on Animals" have [no legal definitions](#) and can be made without substantiation.

In the absence of federal regulation, three independent certifications to look for are:

- [Leaping Bunny](#): This international certification for personal care and household product companies requires independent audits and indicates that animal testing was not used at any stage of product development.
- [Beauty Without Bunnies](#): PETA's self-certification system requires companies' assurance that they do not conduct or commission any animal tests and pledge not to do so in the future.
- [Choose Cruelty-Free](#): This independent, nonprofit organization uses a legally binding contract requiring accredited companies to use and make products and ingredients that have not been tested on animals. They also have a strict, nearly-vegan policy on animal-derived products. CCF certifies Australian products, only some of which are available in the U.S.

### Reducing Consumption

Not everyone wants to become vegan, and some people have legitimate barriers to adopting a plant-based diet. But there is clear data indicating that cutting back on the amount of meat we eat has concrete [environmental benefits](#). In fact, one study found the diets of just one-fifth of the U.S. population are responsible for [46 percent of greenhouse gas emissions](#) from food. And basically, those people eat the most meat — particularly beef.

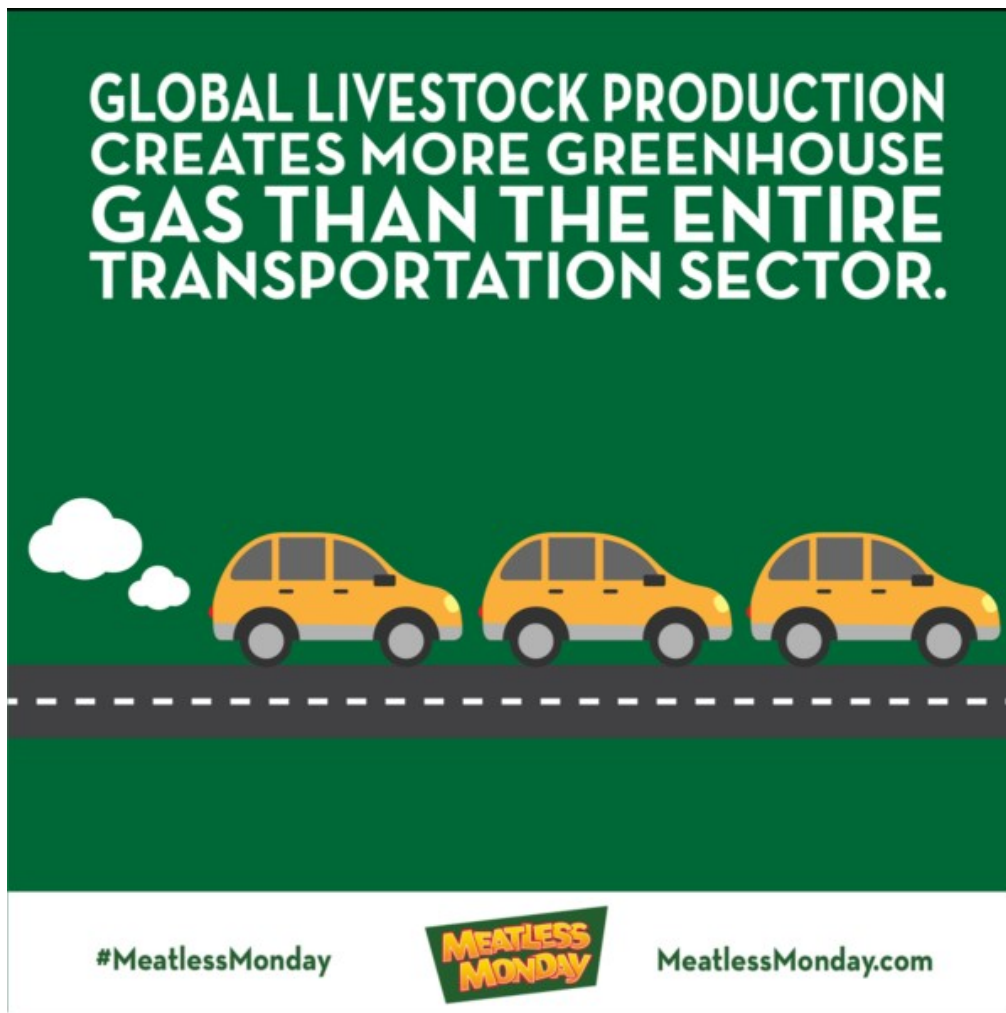


Image: [meatlessmonday.com](https://meatlessmonday.com)

Besides threatening species with extinction through habitat destruction, deforestation releases greenhouse gasses that contribute to climate change. Greenpeace International estimates that in the years 2010-2020, an area twice the size of the UK will have been [deforested](#) in the growing demand for agricultural products. Soy, palm oil, paper/pulp, and cattle are the four largest offenders. And 90 percent of global soy production used for animal feed.

Simple changes like adopting [Meatless Monday](#) can save 425 gallons of water per person per week and reduce carbon emissions equivalent to driving 348 miles over the course of the year. Buying less meat also makes the cost premium of humane-certified meats more affordable.

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