

## Whole Foods Touts New Leaner Chicken in Nod to Welfare Concerns

- New breeds have fewer health problems than conventional birds
- Approved poultry will be pricier until more widely available

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[Whole Foods Markets](#) are introducing poultry breeds to their merchandise lineup that meet new welfare standards amid growing concern about the treatment of animals.

The new products, certified by animal welfare group Global Animal Partnership's Better Chicken Project, are now in stores nationwide. Whole Foods has about 500 stores in the US.

The breeds have fewer health problems than conventional broilers, and also taste better than some of poultry grown at lightning-fast speed, GAP says. So far, there are [11 broiler breeds](#) approved, including those from large companies such as [Aviagen](#) and [Tyson Foods Inc.](#)-owned [Cobb-Vantress](#).

Most of the chickens grown for food across America do not meet Better Chicken Project's requirements. GAP says it expects demand for the new products to "steadily grow" and the availability of chicks from the designated breeds will be enough to satisfy consumers. For years, the group has been studying [different chicken breeds](#) while also evaluating behavior, meat quality and the treatment of birds for this new Better Chicken Project label.

In recent years, there has been more concern about conventional breeding methods for chicken, especially for those grown in a matter of weeks in cramped barns. GAP has said previously that these conventional-bred birds have poor welfare outcomes, including underdeveloped organs and foot injuries. The food from these chickens can have problems as well, such as excess fat strips in breast meat and a tough, gristly texture.

Today's average broiler chickens are ready for harvest quickly, reaching market weight in less than 7 weeks, compared with about 16 weeks a century ago, according to the National Chicken Council. The animals are much bigger than in the past, often sit for much of their lives and have excessively large breasts.

The newly certified birds are red-feathered breeds, with larger feet to allow them to perch at the farms. They're often taller with smaller breasts than conventional chickens. The birds also are more active and energetic, according to Mike Charles, owner of LaBelle Patrimoine, one of the first farms to grow these chickens.

GAP says production costs for approved breeds "will be higher initially and should come down as growers become more familiar with the breeds." They're priced at \$3.99 a pound for entire birds, Whole Foods said. Organic chickens are \$4.49 a pound, while other varieties are \$3.49.

"We're excited that our customers are prioritizing welfare," said Karen Christensen, senior vice president of merchandising for perishables at Whole Foods. "We hope our customers will also notice a difference in the taste and flavor of chicken" in the new products, she said.

Whole Foods, which is owned by Amazon.com Inc., joined the U.S. Working Group for Broiler Welfare in 2022. The group helps businesses that buy chicken in different industries meet animal welfare commitments. It is partnering with Perdue Farms Inc., one of the biggest chicken producers in the US, to help companies such as Whole Foods purchase more humanely raised chicken.