

QUESTIONS TO ASK A STORE MANAGER

ASKING QUESTIONS is the best way to ensure that you're purchasing sustainably raised, healthy foods, and supporting sustainable farmers. Here are some questions to get you started.

WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE SUSTAINABLY RAISED PRODUCTS YOU CARRY AND WHERE THEY COME FROM?

DO YOU SELL ANY SUSTAINABLY RAISED OR ORGANIC MEAT, POULTRY, DAIRY OR EGGS? DO YOU SELL ANY SUSTAINABLY GROWN OR ORGANIC PRODUCE?

These days, most large supermarkets and many smaller stores carry some organic or sustainable foods, so odds are the manager will say "yes."

If the manager says "no," ask them to order some sustainably raised and organic products to sell. Keep in mind that store managers, meat, produce, and dairy department managers, and butchers are usually extremely busy and have a lot of products on their shelves. Don't get discouraged if they don't know anything about sustainably raised food. If enough people ask questions that indicate their desire for sustainably raised products, store managers will respond by stocking them.

If a manager doesn't know what sustainably raised food is, tell them why you are asking, refer them to Sustainable Table (www.sustainabletable.org), offer to share articles and information, and help educate them on the benefits of sustainable food. Make sure to thank them for taking the time to talk with you.

Remember that stores operate on very slim profit margins and have limited shelf space. **If you convince a store manager to start selling a certain item, make sure you buy it when it's in stock.**

- Are they from small family farms in this area?

- Do you know how the animals were raised, or how the vegetables were grown?
- Do you know the name of the farms and where they are located?

Some stores do try to sell products from local sustainable growers and producers and do know about their products, so if the manager can answer your questions and you are satisfied with the answers, skip the next question. If the store manager can't answer your questions, continue below.

If the manager doesn't know where their meat, poultry, dairy, eggs or produce comes from, ask if anyone else in the store would know, or if they can ask their distributor if any of the products were sustainably raised or grown. Most large stores buy their food from a food distributor, not directly from a farm or company.

If the manager agrees to speak with the distributor, you can give the manager a list of questions to ask. (See the back of this handout.) Managers and butchers do care about satisfying customers, and may be willing to follow through on your request.

You may also ask for a contact number for the farms or distributors that the store works with, and try to find out for yourself how the products sold in the store were raised.

(continued)



QUESTIONS TO ASK DISTRIBUTORS

ASKING QUESTIONS is the best way to ensure that you're purchasing sustainably raised, healthy foods, and supporting sustainable farmers. Here are some questions to get you started.

BEEF

- Who raises the cows, and where is the farm located?
- Are the cows raised on pasture?
- Are the cows fed anything other than grass?
- How are the cows finished?
 - Are the cows finished on grain? If so, how old are they when they are started on grain, and for how long are they fed grain?
 - Are the cows finished in a feedlot? If so, at what age are they sent to the feedlot? How long are the cows in the feedlot? How many other cows are there?
- Are the cows ever given antibiotics, hormones, steroids, or growth promoters?

CHICKEN/TURKEY

- Who raises the poultry, and where is the farm located?
- How is the poultry raised? On pasture, indoors, confined? Are they caged?
- How much time does the poultry spend outdoors each day?
- What is the poultry fed?
- Is the poultry ever given antibiotics, hormones, steroids or growth promoters?

DAIRY

- Who raises the cows, and where is the farm located?
- Are the cows raised on pasture?
- Are the cows fed anything else besides grass?
- Are the cows ever given rBGH or any type of synthetic hormone?
- Are the cows ever given antibiotics?

EGGS

- Who raises the hens, and where is the farm located?
- How are the hens raised? On pasture, indoors, confined? Are they caged?
- How much time do the hens spend outdoors each day?
 - Are the hens force molted?
 - What are the hens fed?
 - Are the hens given antibiotics?

HOGS

- Who raises the hogs, and where is the farm located?
- How are the hogs raised from birth until they go to market? Are they pastured, housed indoors, given proper bedding?
- Are the breeding sows held in farrowing pens? Are they able to build nests?
- How much time do the hogs spend outdoors each day?
- What are the hog fed?
- Are the hogs ever given antibiotics, growth enhancers or feed additives?

FRUIT/VEGETABLES

- Who grows the fruits and vegetables and where is the farm located?
- How big is the farm?
- Does the farmer use chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers on his crops?
- Is the farm a diversified operation, with many varieties of vegetables and fruits?
- Does the farm grow any heirloom varieties of fruits or vegetables?
- Are any of the fruit or vegetable varieties genetically engineered?

