

Questions to Ask Retailers

Supermarkets often have a confusing array of labels telling you how your meat was produced (which we explain [here](#)). However, much of the best meat comes from independent retailers, butchers and farmers' markets. Meat from these sources is not always labelled and the best way to find out where it came from and how it was produced is to talk to the person you are buying it from.

Here are some key questions to ask when buying meat:

- **Do you know where this meat came from - ideally the farm where it was raised?**
Retailer should ideally know which farm the meat is from, or which supplier it came from so that you can follow up yourself
- **What standards are the pigs raised to?**
Organic, Free Range, outdoor bred or RSPCA Assured. Not all farms will have been certified to any of these standards, but they will still be able to give you an idea of the conditions there, which you can cross-reference with your [labelling information](#).
- **How often are antibiotics used, and in what circumstances?**
Antibiotics should only be used in essential cases, in other words if the pig is ill and in need of medicine. They should not be used to encourage growth, or simply to keep pigs 'healthy'.

1. ANIMAL WELFARE

- **Are the pigs kept outside, on slatted floors?**
Ideally the pigs will have been outside all of their lives, but pigs that have spent a portion of their lives outside can also be high welfare. Slatted floors are a sign of unethical meat, as they are damaging for the pigs to walk on, and allow excrement to build up, producing toxic gasses
- **Do they always have access to the outdoors? Are the piglets raised outside as well as the sows (mothers)?**
Free range and Organic pigs have access to the outdoors at all times, including the piglets. Outdoor reared sows are kept outside all year around, but piglets are sometimes fattened inside
- **What type of bedding is provided?**
There should be straw bedding to stimulate the pigs, and allow them to live comfortably and cleanly.
- **Are the pigs kept in farrowing crates?**
These are cages that do not allow pigs to move around, pigs that have been reared in this way are stressed and unhappy. Red tractor certified meat allow farrowing crates for up to 28 days.

- **What are the stocking densities?**

Stocking densities vary according to the size of the pigs, but the RSPCA recommends that there should not be more than 30 pigs per hectare, and they should have roughly 1.6m² at Freedom Foods level (this may be less for Red Tractor). It also recommends that Free Range pigs should have 40m²/pig if pigs are not moved after each round of births, and 12m² if they are.

- **Is tail docking practiced?**

Tail-docking is cruel and prohibited in the UK, although in practice farms do still carry out tail-docking - ensure that your retailer does not use pigs that have been tail-docked.

- **At what age are the piglets weaned?**

Piglets should not be weaned from the sow from any earlier than 28 days, but the greater the number of days the better. Organic systems do not wean piglets until they are 40 days old at least.

2. USE OF ANTIBIOTICS

- **How often are they used and in what circumstances?**

Antibiotics should only be used in essential cases, in other words if the pig is ill and in need of medicine. They should not be used to encourage growth, or simply to keep pigs 'healthy'.

- **Are they used to encourage the pigs to grow more quickly?**

If so, this is an irresponsible use of antibiotics that can lead to antibiotic resistance in bacteria.

- **Are they routinely administered?**

Antibiotics should never be routinely administered.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

- **What type of feed is used and where does it come from?**

*According to GM Freeze, there is **no guaranteed non-GM pork in any supermarket**. This follows **the decision by supermarkets in 2013** to stop using non-GM feed in their premium lines. Organic is now the only guarantee of non-GM feed.*

- **Does the pig feed contain soy? Is the soy grown sustainably and not on deforested land?**

The majority of European livestock feed is made up of GM-soy, grown in South America where Rainforest and Cerrado habitats are being cut down for soy plantations. The plantations are heavily treated with pesticides that poison local people & ecosystems. Europe is currently importing 40 million tonnes of soy a year for animal feed.

- **How far has the pork travelled from farm to plate?**

The pork should be from inside in the UK - the fewer food miles the better.

- **How is the waste from the pigs dealt with? Are appropriate precautions made to stop it running into water supplies?**

Waste from pigs running into water supplies pollutes water supplies and ruins ecosystems, farmers should deal with waste responsibly.

- **Does the farm practice land rotation to stop land from being overused by livestock?**
Ideally farmers will rotate the land on which the pigs are kept to keep it from becoming overgrazed and maintaining soil quality.