

# HOW TO FIND HEALTHY, SAFE FOOD DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

by Harry Rhodes

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly impacted our food system, especially the meat and poultry sectors. Meatpacking plants have closed because workers became sick, leading to reports of meat shortages. The Trump Administration responded by ordering the meat plants to stay open, putting the workers at even greater risk. At the same time, there has been a surplus of meat and milk, forcing the food to be wasted even while people are going hungry. How can both of these scenarios be happening simultaneously?



There are many myths about the meat and poultry raised and produced in our country. It is often assumed that independent family farms produce this abundant, relatively inexpensive food and that it is safe and nutritious. In reality, four corporations control 80 percent of the meat produced in the United States. The terrible treatment of workers is just one of the many ways these giant corporations harm our communities and neglect public health. The problems begin with the farms supplying animals to the meatpackers, where crowding and unhealthy practices lead to routine antibiotic use and the consequent spread of antibiotic resistant superbugs.

The nonprofit organization I lead, Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT), promotes the safe and humane production of meat, milk, and eggs. We envision that all food-producing animals will be raised in a healthy and humane manner, so that everyone will have access to safe and humanely-produced food.

FACT is committed to helping livestock and poultry farmers raise their animals outdoors on well-managed pasture due to the numerous benefits associated with pasture-based animal production. Animals living on pasture can move freely and engage in natural behaviors. They also experience lower stress, disease and lameness, as well as fewer reproductive problems. Pasture-based animal production can help to improve soil health and fertility, and mitigate climate change.

In addition, studies consistently show that pasture-raised animals produce nutritionally superior meat, milk and eggs. When compared to food from animals that were fed grain and raised in confinement, food from animals raised on pasture has better fat quality and increased levels of essential vitamins and nutrients. You can find more free information about the nutritional benefits of pasture-raised foods and the truth about many claims that you find on packages at [foodanimalconcernstrust.org/food-labels](https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/food-labels).

So, you may ask, where can I find this good, healthy food? FACT recently published its National Directory of Local Food Vendors ([foodanimalconcernstrust.org/vendor-list](https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/vendor-list)) to support small family farms and to provide an alternative for consumers to large national distribution and supermarket chains. This directory helps consumers during this difficult period when so many of us are spending more time at home and looking for alternatives to shopping at big supermarkets. There are many affordable, healthy food shopping options in Illinois, Wisconsin and even Indiana that deliver to the Chicago metro area.

Farmers markets are also a good place to start, and Chicago has some fantastic options. Most were closed during the early months of the pandemic, but have since reopened. <https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org/markets>

The global coronavirus crisis has exposed the fragility of the industrial food system. It's clear that independent family farms are an essential part of a more resilient food system. We as consumers can change our food system, and demand that all food is produced humanely, that it is healthy and safe, and that the people working throughout the food system are treated fairly and are working in safe environments.

*Harry Rhodes is Executive Director of a Chicago-based nonprofit organization Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT). FACT promotes the safe and humane production of meat, milk, and eggs, and envisions that all food-producing animals will be raised in a healthy and humane manner so that everyone will have access to safe and humanely-produced food in communities across the country. For more information, visit [foodanimalconcernstrust.org](https://foodanimalconcernstrust.org)*

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