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# TOO MUCH AT STEAK

*How to choose your meat;  
less and good, clean and fair*



**Slow Food®**

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# Introduction



Produced by Slow Food, ActionAid and Compassion in World Farming, this guide takes a closer look at one of our most popular foods: meat.

Red, white, game: every EU citizen consumes on average 232 grams of meat per capita per day, a total of 85 kilos per capita per year. For a healthy diet, the recommended amount is around 630 grams a week. So each of us is eating for 2.5 times more. This has heavy environmental costs and is also a clear example of inequality. For example, sub-saharian Africa consumes less than 5 kilos per capita per year. Some people are eating to excess while others are going to bed hungry. Furthermore the vast expanses of land and grain needed to feed and raise the animals for those who overeat meat is often taken from those who cannot afford to eat it at all.

In the following pages you'll find good practices that can be applied to everyday life, when shopping, at home or in a restaurant. The pleasure that food gives us cannot be complete if it causes harm and hunger around the world, nor if it endangers our health because we eat too much or animal welfare is poor.

Consumers have great power. They can redirect the market and production through greater awareness of the impact of their choices. The solution is in front of us: eat less meat, eat better meat and pay a fair price.



If we want to eat meat to excess but pay little, it drives farmers to produce large quantities of poor quality meat. The animals' life cycles are sped up, causing them to grow or produce at speeds that their bodies cannot endure while dramatically shortening their life span. Cheap meat arrives on the market and the vicious cycle continues as the low prices encourage us to fill up our shopping carts and consume more and more.

We make 70% of our food purchases in supermarkets, where a cheap chicken often costs per kilo less than a bell pepper. Considering how much an animal has been eating during its life, how can it cost so little to take an animal from birth to slaughter?

Two principles drive the modern production cycle for meat: speed and quantity. The more that is produced cheaply, based on an industrialized farming model, the higher the costs to the environment, public health, animals, farmers and people's right to food.

Intensive farms use more food than they produce, for every 100 calories of food (that could be eaten by humans) that we feed to livestock, we get just 30 calories back in the form of meat and milk.



*If we eat less meat,  
bees will be happier!*



What do bees have to do with my steak? Another hidden cost of the intensive production of meat is the loss of biodiversity and natural habitats.

The enormous fields of mono-culture crops that are required to feed animals that are kept indoors all their lives rely on the extensive use of pesticides. These pesticides are having a dramatic impact on bee populations around the world. In more traditional smaller-scale farming, farmers rotate their crops making use of nature's natural pest control.

By eating smaller amounts of higher quality meat you can support the future of bees.





## Environment

On small-scale traditional farms, livestock gain all or most of their feed from the land they are kept on. This means that they are kept at a lower stocking density and their manure is useful as a fertilizer. In industrial farming, the situation is the opposite.

The quantities of manure that the animals produce are so excessive that they become pollutants. The feed is produced by intensive cropping methods, sometimes hundreds or thousands of miles away, using environmentally damaging mineral fertilizers and pesticides. Industrial livestock production pollutes water, soil



Litres of water needed to produce one kilo of some foods

and air with excess nutrients from manure and fertilizers and is a large contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

Producing a kilo of beef in a particularly resource intensive rearing system like Kobe releases greenhouse gases, responsible for global warming, equal to 36.4 kilos of CO<sub>2</sub>; when we sit down with our family to eat a roast beef weighing one kilo, it's the same as driving for 250 km! Not something you want to do every day.

Producing one kilo of beef takes the same amount of energy as leaving a 100-watt light bulb switched on for 20 days.

## Health

In developed countries we eat too much meat. Excessive meat consumption is linked to cardiovascular disease and to some cancers. Diets high in saturated fats are associated with increasing levels of cholesterol in the blood and type 2 diabetes. Modern diets tend to be deficient in omega-3 fats and contain a comparatively high proportion of omega-6 fats. Some nutritionists believe this imbalance is linked to a number of health problems, including atherosclerosis, heart disease, depression, cancer and arthritis.

There is a higher proportion of these omega-3 fats in the meat of animals fed on grass or forage compared to animals fed on grains.



*Eating large quantities of animal protein and fat is the best way to become... a sumo wrestler.*

## Animals

Animal welfare is not a primary concern of standard industrial farms, effectively factories for meat and milk production. 'Factory farming' prioritizes maximum production above all else. Animals are treated as commodities and are often raised in intense confinement. Beef cattle weigh around 700 kilos and are fed between 10 and 12 times their weight before slaughtering. The cattle are fed high-protein diets to make them grow quickly or produce more milk; out of ten kilos of feed, seven will be high-protein grains like corn and soy.

Traditional dairy cattle breeds can live for more than 15 years and give birth six or seven times. They do produce less milk than modern breeds, but the modern breeds have an average lifespan of 4.5 to 5.5 years and give birth only 2.5 or 3.5 times. Intensive farming simply replaces them with other animals and carries on, without any consideration for the animal's welfare, waste, pollution or the loss of animal biodiversity. The modern intensive dairy cow is the hardest working of all farm animals and is often culled early, when she is so worn out that she becomes infertile.

The average lifespan of a white veal calf is just six months. Farmed sows live for three years, when normally they could live for 18, meat pigs are slaughtered at around 5-6 months of age. The chickens we buy in the supermarkets are slaughtered after just 35 to 60 days.

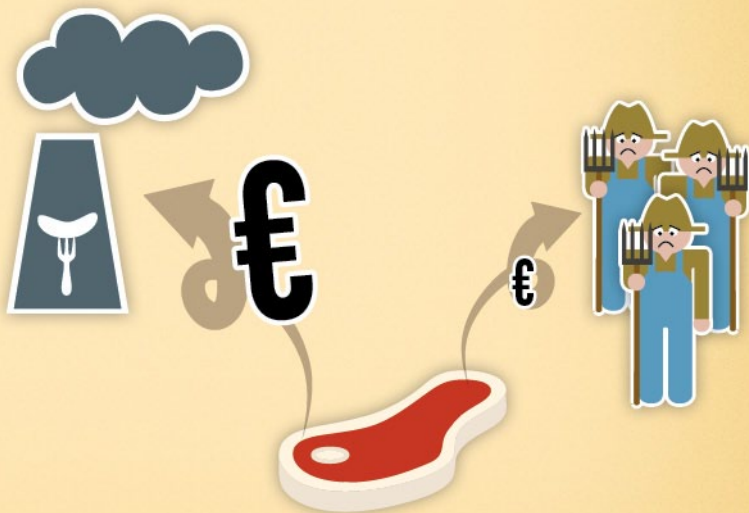
*To keep up with our over-consumption, we need meat factories.*



## Farmers

The current meat production model is based on increasingly low returns for the farmer. Out of the retail price we pay, only a small amount goes to the producer, while the rest goes to intermediaries, processing industries and distributors. It is a system based essentially on increased production and cost reduction. This mechanism is highly dependent on subsidies, provided by the taxpayer, to keep functioning. Many farmers are going out of business and there is a trend across Europe for fewer, bigger farms, which also leads to a reduction in employment.

If farmers could take the time required to produce quality products, whilst still making a living, and if consumers ate less meat and paid a fair price for it, then this downward spiral could be halted.





## Right to food

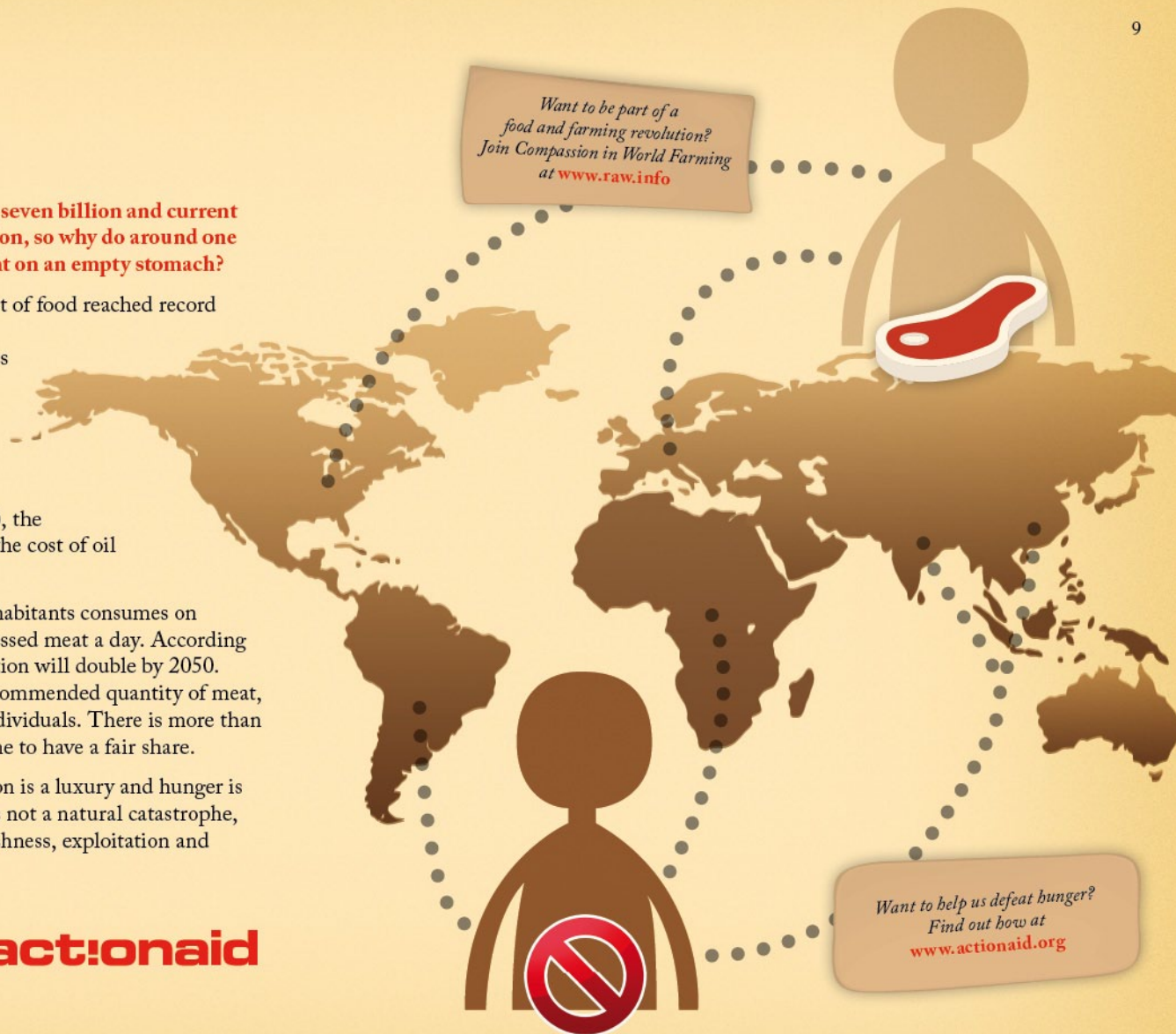
**Problem:** The world's population is seven billion and current food production could feed ten billion, so why do around one billion people go to sleep every night on an empty stomach?

According to FAO estimates, the cost of food reached record highs in 2011. The increase in meat consumption is one of the clear causes of the recent food crisis. The rise in demand for foodstuffs is due not only to demographic growth, but also the use of these commodities for purposes other than feeding people (livestock fodder and biofuels), the devaluation of the dollar, the rise in the cost of oil and financial speculation.

Each one of Europe's 750 million inhabitants consumes on average 209 grams of fresh and processed meat a day. According to FAO projections, global consumption will double by 2050. If 750 million people ate only the recommended quantity of meat, the excess would feed 991 million individuals. There is more than enough meat in the world for everyone to have a fair share.

In the global south, meat consumption is a luxury and hunger is the leading cause of death. Hunger is not a natural catastrophe, but the result of unfair policies, selfishness, exploitation and indifference.

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# Standard industrial farming

## What is it?

To respond to the growing demand for meat produced quickly and cheaply, pastures have been replaced by permanent stall housing and feedlots. Animals are reared in closed environments, where all of their functions are controlled by the drive for production: little movement, no freedom, reduced life cycles and preventive medical treatments.

## What it means for animals

Animal farming throughout the world has become increasingly intensive. This is partly a response to demand from consumers for cheaper meat, milk and eggs and to the pressure on farmers from supermarkets for cheaper produce. Animals are treated as units of production rather than sentient creatures.

Intensive farming across the world can involve:

- crowding animals close together
- keeping them in large groups
- routine mutilations like tail docking and beak trimming



- confining them to cages
- using high levels of antibiotics to prevent diseases and to accelerate growth
- selectively breeding animals to grow faster or produce more meat, milk or eggs

Well over 95% of domestic animals live on farms. Today around 60 billion animals are reared each year for food, and this number is likely to more than double during the course of the century. Over 80% of the animals raised in the EU each year are factory farmed.

If animals are to be farmed, then we have a responsibility to ensure that they are kept in humane farming systems. They must be allowed to live a life free from pain and mental distress, and be able to express their natural behaviors. Keeping animals in cruel conditions is unacceptable.

People disagree about how much animals matter, the reasons why they should matter and even whether they matter at all. Animal welfare matters because animals are sentient beings. In other words, they can suffer pain and distress or be happy and enjoy life. Higher welfare meat also tastes better and is better for you.



## What it means for the environment

According to the FAO, livestock production is responsible for 18% of the greenhouse gases that trap heat in the atmosphere, leading to:

- melting glaciers
- rising sea levels
- natural disasters like flooding and storms
- thinning of the ozone layer
- ocean acidification
- increasing desertification

But greenhouse gas emission is not the only environmental consequence:

- soil and water are polluted because of farming waste and chemicals used in the fields
- water resources are highly depleted because of the water used to grow feeding crops and rear the animals
- natural habitats are often destroyed in the search for new land to farm, graze and grow



## Best practices/1

- » base your diet on plant foods that can replace meat, like legumes and oil seeds
- » choose higher welfare meat
- » choose local and seasonal products



## What it means for humans

- increased bacterial resistance to antibiotics due to their overuse on industrial farms
- development of new human diseases, especially viruses (for example, influenza)
- damage from pollution
- shortage of land for growing food for direct human consumption, and more land used for producing animal feed
- greater poverty for those who depend on subsistence agriculture based on climate patterns (dry and rainy seasons)
- rise in diseases linked to the excessive consumption of animal protein and fat: cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, obesity



## Best practices/2

Push your representatives and policy makers to:

- » rethink agricultural policies, providing incentives for sustainable, higher welfare farming that uses local breeds and supplies local markets and discouraging the intensive model of agriculture
- » encourage closed-cycle farms that reuse manure as fertilizer
- » promote sustainable development policies in the global south



## *Do you know, what you're eating?*

Have you ever thought about how many kinds of meat there are, and how many we regularly eat? In the EU pork and poultry dominate the market, but this imbalance towards two animals encourages the development of industrial farming. Market demand leads farmers to intensively produce just a few species. Choosing different animals and breeds helps lighten this pressure.

The same is true for cuts of meat: cattle are not just made up of steaks. The parts we don't buy often end up as waste. Wasted meat leads to the demand for more and more animals to be farmed. Therefore we should buy also less popular cuts.



**LOIN CUTS + FILLETS**



**BEEF WASTED PARTS**

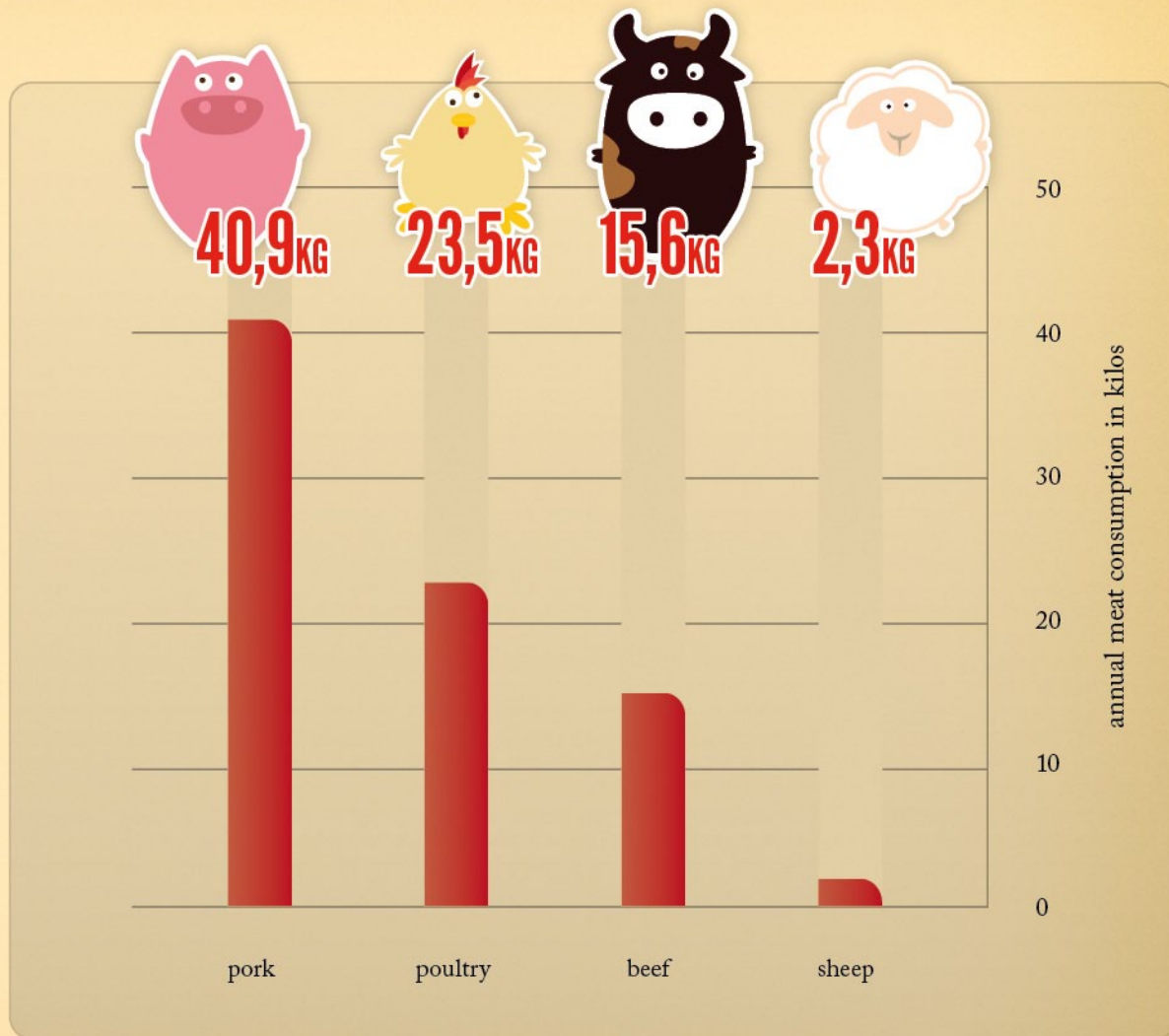


Don't just buy the same thing over and over!

Try higher welfare turkey, duck, goose, chicken, pheasant, lamb, mutton, buffalo... these are often cheaper too.

*Annual  
meat consumption  
per person in the  
European Union*

Just three kinds of meat count for more  
than 90% of total consumption.





## *From farm to shop*

Animals should be respected and treated carefully for the duration of their lives, from birth to death. The last moments of an animal's life should avoid pain and suffering, and slaughtering methods should follow humane slaughtering principles.

Poor slaughter practices influence the final quality of meat. Causing pain and stress during slaughtering can induce the production of adrenaline, and the meat will then have visible defects, ending up pale, soft, wet-looking, tough and often tasteless.

Usually, slaughtering is followed by hanging the carcase at temperatures between 1° and 4°C, which ages and tenderises the meat. Especially for beef and game, this phase helps to make the meat more tender, and can also influence flavor and juiciness. Short hanging times produce meat that is tough to chew.

Hanging usually lasts a few days for poultry; 4 to 10 days for pork, sheep and goat, and 7 to 20 days for beef.



**2-4 DAYS**



**4-10 DAYS**



**7-20 DAYS**

## Know your meat...

Meat can be divided into three categories.

### RED

Rich in myoglobin, a protein that transfers oxygen to the tissue and has a high iron content. Red meats include beef, mutton, lamb, goat and buffalo.



### WHITE

This is low in myoglobin and include pork and poultry (chicken, goose, duck).



### GAME

These meats are usually dark red because of the intensive activity of muscular fibres, rich in oxygen. Game can be furred (venison, boar) or feathered (pheasants, partridge, quail).



## ... and know its benefits

Meat, along with other foods like fish, legumes, milk and dairy products, represents a major source of protein and contributes to the intake of other important nutrients. However, it is low in fibre and carbohydrates and therefore is not a complete food. In fact, prioritizing meat makes for an unbalanced diet and has possible health consequences.

*Cartilage (gristle) is collagen, not fat: it is high in protein, helps salivation and exercises the teeth, reinforcing facial muscles and developing the palate. Don't trim it off!*

What nutrients can meat provide?

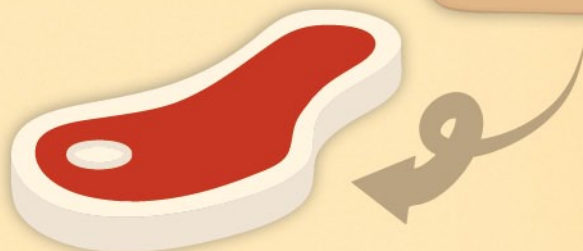
### Protein

Meat is rich in protein, essential to help the body grow and stay healthy. The pearly covering of muscles is also rich in collagen, an important protein.

### Carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals

The only carbohydrate in meat is glycogen, which decreases after slaughtering. Meat is rich in iron and vitamins, but they can be deactivated by the heat of cooking, losing most of their beneficial functions.

*Fat helps cooking: overly lean meat loses water while it cooks and can become tough and dry.*



### Fat

The presence of fat in meat is not a negative factor, not just because of its nutritional characteristics, but also because marbling (intramuscular fat seen as thin streaks or patches of white) is a sign of a well-fed animal that has enjoyed a certain level of wellbeing. However, fat and connective tissues are often automatically rejected by consumers, thus creating problems for farmers. The difficulty in selling certain cuts, especially fatty ones, forces them into bad breeding, feeding and animal welfare practices.

*When meat is frozen, it loses nutrients like vitamin E and folic acid.*

## Ready to go shopping

### How good is the meat you're eating?



How can you recognize high welfare meat at the moment of purchase?

Tenderness is not the only factor to consider: the presence of fat, for example, is important because during cooking it helps meat stay flavoursome and juicy. Flabby meat that's sticky to the touch does not suggest high quality, and generally meat should have a uniform pink or red colour.

Paleness is often not a good sign, especially in pork, and particularly when combined with noticeable wetness and a surface coating. Fat should

be white; a yellow hue might indicate that it is turning rancid, although it can also be due to pasture-based diets which in this case is a positive aspect.



### What the label can tell us

Unfortunately labels do not carry the full information needed to make responsible purchases. But they can sometimes tell you:

- name and address of the facility that slaughtered the animal and packaged the cut
- weight and commercial designation (species, category, cut);
- expiration date
- storage method

### What the label cannot tell us

- if the animals have been reared intensively
- with the exception of beef, no information is mandatory on birth, farming and slaughtering countries

It is important that labels give you all the information you need to make responsible purchases. Labelling the methods of production would be a good way to achieve this.



## Best practices/3

What should you look for when shopping?

- » eat less meat and of higher quality, avoiding meat from standard industrial farms
- » vary types of animals and breeds, choosing alternative meats and less popular cuts
- » eat meat from animals farmed and slaughtered in your country, ideally local and from small-scale farmers of native breeds
- » prefer meat from consortia, associations or companies with strict specifications on diet and animal welfare, as well as clear information about product traceability. For more information on companies who use/sell higher welfare produce see [www.compassioninfoodbusiness.com](http://www.compassioninfoodbusiness.com)
- » pay attention to price: overly cheap prices are often a sign of animal and environmental exploitation
- » only buy fresh meat in quantities that can be consumed quickly
- » be more tolerant of the presence of fat, which can be a sign of animal wellbeing
- » read the label carefully
- » save money by choosing less popular kind of meats, such as organ meats and lesser-known cuts
- » let your retailer know what sort of products you would like to buy, encourage them to stock more high quality products



## Native breeds and the Slow Food Presidia

The livestock breeds protected by Slow Food through the Presidia are farmed following strict production protocols based on preserving traditions and ensuring sustainability. Furthermore Slow Food believes that animal welfare is fundamental in reaching sustainability, and is thus committed to improving farming conditions:

- native breeds are favoured and protected because they are linked to a specific geographic place and its traditions, as well as the local environmental, social and economic context
- the animal's diet is based mainly on hay, fodder and a mix of grains, oats and legumes, avoiding genetically modified products and corn silage
- farming and slaughtering methods respect seasonality



Slow Food Foundation  
for Biodiversity

At the website  
[www.slowfoodfoundation.com](http://www.slowfoodfoundation.com)  
you can find the full list  
of producers participating  
in the project.

## What not to do

- Don't eat too much meat
- Don't regularly use high-temperature cooking methods and grilling, which can destroy important nutrients
- Don't buy meat from animals raised in standard industrial farms

## How to store meat at home

Keeping meat at the right temperature is essential not just for food safety, but also to maintain its sensory quality.

It is important to pay attention to temperature as soon as the meat is removed from the chiller cabinet. If the journey home is more than two or three hours and the temperature is particularly high, quality can deteriorate and it is best to use a cooler or an insulated bag.

## How can you recognize badly stored meat?

- When raw, the meat "loses" water
- The fat takes on a yellowish color unless the animals have been pasture fed
- The lean parts are dark red, tending towards purplish-brown
- The meat gives off a bad smell because of the spread of microbes





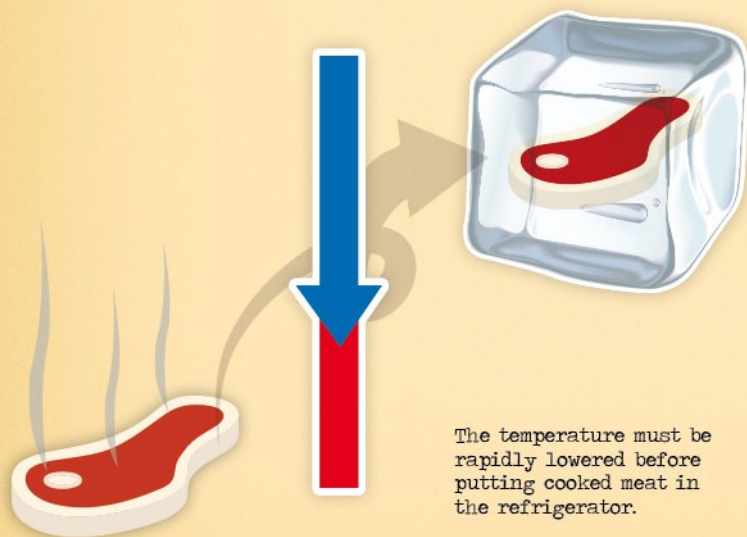
There are different ways to store meat.

### Fresh

Storage times in a refrigerator at 4°C are not long: six or seven days for whole cuts, three or four days for pieces of meat and steaks and one or two days for mince or thin slices.

### Cooked

Cooked meat lasts longer, but if improperly stored it quickly loses its sensory characteristics (the temperature must be rapidly lowered before putting it in the refrigerator).



The temperature must be rapidly lowered before putting cooked meat in the refrigerator.

### Frozen

Freezing allows for long storage times: up to one year for beef, six months for pork and three months for poultry. Defrosted meat should not be refrozen.



### Vacuum-packed

Most suitable for prepared meats like charcuterie and cooked foods, rather than fresh meat. Vacuum-packed meat takes on a dark color that improves when exposed to air.



Compassion in World Farming is an NGO founded over 40 years ago.

Today we campaign peacefully to end all cruel factory farming.

We are immensely proud of what we have achieved:

- we have exposed the reality of intensive farming systems and brought them to the attention of the world's media
- our political lobbying and campaigning has resulted in the EU recognizing animals as sentient beings. We have also secured landmark agreements to outlaw the barren battery cage for egg-laying hens, narrow veal crates and sow stalls across Europe
- Compassion's Food Business Team is working with some of the world's biggest food companies to improve their animal welfare standards

There are still many challenges we have to face if we are to realize our vision of a world where all farm animals are treated with compassion and respect and where cruel factory farming practices end.

For more information see [www.ciwf.org](http://www.ciwf.org)



We believe everyone has the power to create change, in

ourselves, our families and communities. People living in poverty aren't waiting for change to happen; they're getting on with it.

Together with the world's poorest people, ActionAid staff and supporters, partners and donors in 50 countries are taking action for justice and development. Right now, there are women breaking free from cycles of poverty and violence. And youth leading action for a better world.

We are more powerful when we work together. Whether that's by raising funds, campaigning against unjust government policies or demanding rights to land and food. That's when we really start to see 'The Power in People' making change happen.

To know more: [www.actionaid.org](http://www.actionaid.org)



## Slow Food®

clean for the environment and fair for producers and consumers, raising the profile of the former's labour and protecting the latter's wallet.

For further info [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com)

Slow Food is a non-profit association that works to defend food biodiversity and to promote food that is good for the palate,

## Colophon

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