

Buy only “hormone free” meat? Farmer says don’t be fooled by deceptive labels

I’m a mom, a grandma and a farmer. I’m also a consumer and buy most of my food at my local grocery store. I’m grateful for the safest food supply in human history, and glad that there are rules in place that ensure its safety, and regulate label claims so that they are truthful and accurate. However, as I make my way around the store I see many labels appearing more and more that bend the truth or perhaps are even outright deceptive. We are seeing this more and more.



on meat that mention hormones. The misleading

information and innuendos create needless fear and mistrust

for consumers purchasing meat. I know this because of conversations I’ve had with my fellow shoppers. I know this because I raise the animals.

I also volunteer alongside a group of other farm women with a group called [CommonGround](#). The group includes members from all over the United States and represents family farms of all sizes and types. The South Dakota gals I volunteer with focus on activities that allow us to visit with consumers about food and farming topics. We attend expos, conferences and participate in Farm to Fork dinners.

At every event I ask questions and encourage conversation. As a pig farmer, one question I always ask people is, “What percentage of pork (or poultry) is raised in the US *without* added hormones?” I even try to be helpful and give three answers to choose from: “Is it 50%, 75% or 100%?” Of all the times I have asked this question (sadly) I have never had one person answer it correctly. The answer is 100%. Yes, it’s true: **No pigs or poultry are given added hormones.**

When I ask why they think added hormones are used it always comes back to one answer—labels.

[\[Here are the USDA regulations for meat and poultry:](#)

NO HORMONES (pork or poultry):

Hormones are not allowed in raising hogs or poultry. Therefore, the claim “no hormones added” **cannot be used** on the labels of pork or poultry unless it is followed by a statement

that says “Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones.

NO HORMONES (beef):

The term “no hormones administered” **may** be approved for use on the label of beef products if sufficient documentation is provided to the Agency by the producer showing no hormones have been used in raising the animals.

NO ANTIBIOTICS (red meat and poultry)

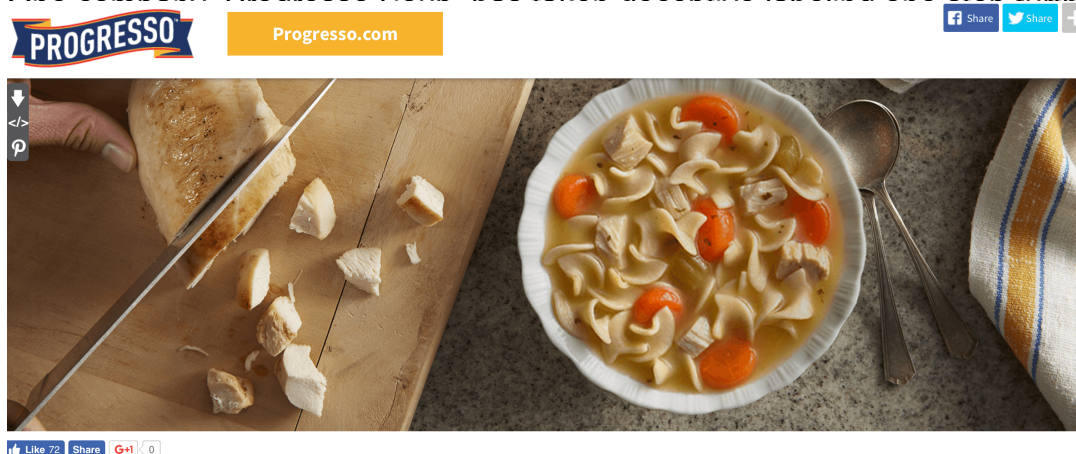
The terms “no antibiotics added” may be approved for use on the label of red meat and poultry products if sufficient documentation is provided by the producer demonstrating that the



animals were raised without antibiotics.]

When food manufacturers, retailers and restaurant chains inundate consumers with “no added hormones” messaging it implies that pork or poultry products without those claims *must have added hormones*. To be fair, “no hormones” claims are required by law to have a disclaimer stating “federal regulation prohibits the use of hormones in pork (and poultry).” But let’s be honest, very few people read the mice type on the package back. And the companies involved in this deceptive marketing are banking on this confusion in their quest to insinuate that their product is superior to other pork or poultry on the market.

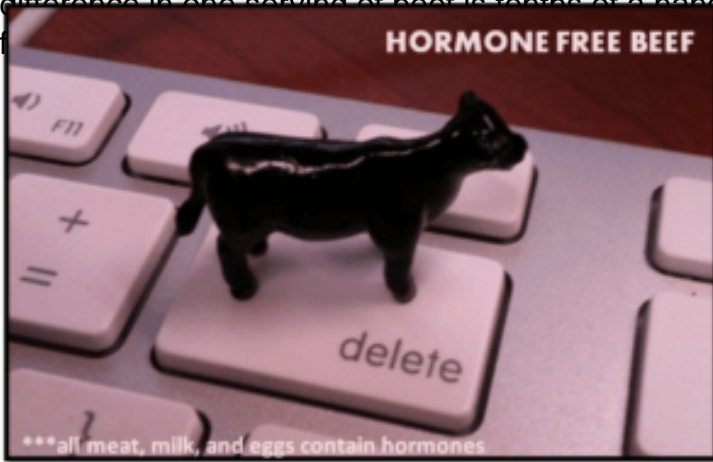
On January 1, Progresso Soup has taken deceptive labeling one step further. They announced in commercials that their chicken is free of antibiotics and hormones, including animals raised without antibiotics.



PROGRESSO COMPLETES MOVE TO ANTIBIOTIC AND HORMONE FREE CHICKEN BREASTS IN ALL CHICKEN SOUP VARIETIES

and ranchers can choose to use hormone supplements. I am a beef farmer and like many other American beef farmers I utilize an approved and safe hormone supplement in my calves during their finishing phase. After our calves are weaned in the fall, a slow release tablet is placed under the skin in their ear. This supplement helps cattle utilize their feed more efficiently, which means they need less feed and water to reach market weight. This practice uses technology to supplement nature to enhance the output, on the same input. That's the definition of sustainability.

As a parent and grandparent I understand that others just want real answers when they sit down for hamburgers or steak at dinner time with their family. But as the first step in the process, I can assure them that the supplement is long gone by the time cattle go to market for processing, so the end result is little difference between supplemented and non-supplemented beef. Matter of fact, it is negligible. The difference in one serving of beef is tenths of a nanogram, which is like one blade of grass in a football field. I am just about feeding my family a safe and nutritious product.



As farmers, I believe it is important to utilize all safe

tools to reduce environmental impact and produce a safe, yet profitable product. This simple supplement helps us improve sustainability with no effect on food safety.

I think if all my fellow shoppers spent a day on the farm rather than misleading labels, they could make food choices with confidence and without unnecessary fear. I think it's time we demand honesty and integrity in marketing practices by food product suppliers. Instead of capitalizing on fear and misleading consumers into buying a product that is lacking something it never had, maybe they could boast about how modern farm technologies were used to create safe and sustainable food products with your family and our planet in mind.

Peggy Greenway is a city girl from Minnesota turned farmer, and now producing pork, beef, corn, soybeans, wheat and alfalfa in Mitchell, South Dakota. Twitter handle: @greenwaypork