

**Food Routes Network/Midwest Collaborators**  
**Pasture Raised Products Message and Strategy**  
**Consumer Focus Group Study**

**Prepared for:**

Food Routes Network and Midwest Collaborators—  
a collaboration between  
Midwest Food Alliance,  
Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture  
at the University of Minnesota,  
the Center for Integrated Agriculture Systems  
at the University of Wisconsin,  
Practical Farmers of Iowa,  
The Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, and  
Iowa State University Extension

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## **I. About the Study**

Six focus groups were held across the Midwest on behalf of FoodRoutes and the Midwest Collaborators. These groups were held in support of the development of key marketing messages for use by producers of pasture raised products and to further assist producers in planning marketing efforts for these products. Discussions included:

- Participants' general food buying habits;
- Issues related to meat, poultry and dairy products;
- Appropriate production terms for use in marketing these products and their benefits;
- Messages for use in marketing these products; and
- Feedback on overall communications and marketing strategies.

All groups lasted approximately two hours. One group was held in each of the following Midwest cities.

<b>Group A:</b>	October 14, 2002	Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota
	Group makeup:	6 males, 5 females
<b>Group B:</b>	October 15, 2002	Rochester, Minnesota
	Group makeup:	5 males, 6 females
<b>Group C:</b>	October 21, 2002	Madison, Wisconsin
	Group makeup:	4 males, 8 females
<b>Group D:</b>	October 22, 2002	Stephens Point, Wisconsin
	Group makeup:	1 male, 10 females
<b>Group E:</b>	October 28, 2002	Des Moines, Iowa
	Group makeup:	5 males, 5 females
<b>Group F:</b>	October 29, 2002	Waterloo, Iowa
	Group makeup:	7 males, 5 females

Participants were recruited by professional research firms in each area using criteria determined by FoodRoutes and Midwest Collaborators. Criteria included:

- Primary food buyer for household;
- Tendency to recycle and see some impact of food buying habits on the environment;
- Mix of gender and age;

- High school diploma or higher; and
- Minimum of \$40K household income\*

\* Income requirements were reduced in the Stephens Point area to better match local averages.

Potential participants working in the market research, advertising or food production and distribution industries were screened out of these focus groups.

It's important to remember that focus group participants are not randomly selected and therefore not representative of a specific population. Focus groups are considered qualitative research and, unlike with quantitative research, the results cannot be projected onto a larger population.

All focus groups were moderated by Kim Shelquist, an Iowa-based communications and marketing research specialist.

## II. Executive Summary

**Participants raise many issues.** These groups reveal a wide range of issues related to meat, poultry and dairy purchases. They include:

- Respondents shop for food in a variety of places, but convenience is key to regular visits;
- Coupons and other incentives lead respondents to try new products;
- Respondents buy meat and poultry according to how it looks;
- Expiration date and past brand experience guide dairy purchases;
- Healthy is important, but not at the expense of taste;
- Ease of use of the product and price are key;
- Many respondents have bought direct from the farmer, but some resist buying in bulk and paying higher processing fees;
- Respondents don't always trust their food source – whether it's a large corporation or a local farmer – to provide safe, quality food;
- Respondents are most concerned about disease and bacteria, less concerned with hormones and antibiotics;
- Name of technique (i.e., pasture raised, free range, etc.) is less important than having a standard definition for that term that they can trust;
- Respondents need to know there are standards for this type of production and that someone is making sure those standards are met;
- Products need a unifying identity or brand – even when the product is offered by a variety of producers;
- Consumers are overloaded with information – both positive and negative – and don't know what to believe;
- Respondents say to really catch their attention, product marketing must emphasize the direct benefits to the consumer (i.e., low fat, healthier, etc.);

- Environmental benefits of this type of production aren't obvious to the consumers in these groups; and
- Respondents do see the benefits to local farmers and the local economy.

**In general, pasture raised is the term these participants favor.** They say they like that it brings to mind less confined animals and a farmer caring for those animals – primarily cows and chickens. That said, respondents aren't unanimous on this issue. Some like free range, saying they've had free range eggs and chickens that were of high quality. Grass fed has some supporters but largely raises questions about supplemental feed in the off-season. Natural also has supporters who see it as implying less chemical use, but many say this term is vague and overused.

**Regardless of term, a definition and standards must be set.** These respondents are mostly confused by the terms presented in these groups. They say they have to know what the term means and that someone is checking to make sure that products labeled with that term go through a verification process.

**Opportunities and barriers exist to marketing pasture raised products.** On the one hand these respondents say they are open to trying new products. They care about the potential health benefits they see in pasture raised products. They want to support local farmers and have some concerns about animal welfare. On the other hand, these respondents say they are less likely to trust products produced without regulation. They also expect these products to cost more and that means they must be of noticeably higher quality. Respondents also question how convenient these products are to find and use.

**Respondents must know what's in it for them.** While they say they care about the environmental benefits and they want production techniques to keep animal well-being in mind, they really care about how the product benefits them and their families. In the end their purchase decisions are based on convenient access to healthy, good tasting food at a reasonable price. Any slogans, messages or brands used to market pasture raised products must emphasize these characteristics.

**Respondent ask for traditional communications.** These respondents say they get their information about food issues from traditional media (i.e., television, radio, print, etc.) and they do pay attention to advertising. Their responses also indicate that word of mouth from friends and family is a potentially powerful tool for combating their lack of trust in untried products.

### III. Summary of Key Findings

**Respondents shop in a variety of places, but convenience is key.** Traditional grocery stores, convenience stores, farmers markets, super stores, roadside stands, butcher shops, bakeries and even online – you name it and these respondents have probably shopped it. However, in order for these folks to add it to their list of regular stops, it has to be convenient (i.e., on their way home from work, in the neighborhood, etc.).

*I go on cost and convenience – the amount of time I have to shop and if I’m already in that area.*

*Open 24 hours [is good] so I can go when the kids are sleeping.*

*If I’m looking for something special I go to Lund’s or Byerly’s.*

**Incentives get respondents to try a new place or product.** Coupons, sales promotions and taste samples top the list of motivators when it comes to getting most of these respondents to try a new source for food items or a new food product. Close runners up include recommendations from friends and family, taste bud tempting advertising campaigns and anything “new.”

*Samples, the little tasting options get me to try new things.*

*Coupons, a lot of time the Sunday paper will have really good store coupons.*

*Sales help us try new things.*

*When new places open up, we tend to try them.*

*I go somewhere new either due to word of mouth or if I hear an advertisement.*

**Looks sell meat and poultry, date and brand are it when it comes to dairy.** Most of these respondents say when it comes to meat and poultry they want to see the product to check for freshness and fat deposits. They want to be sure the package is clean and not bloody or – in the case of poultry – slimy. Some say they check the date on the package, but acknowledge that they’ve seen too many stories about repackaging to truly trust that.

*Packaging makes a big difference to me. I like to see [the meat].*

*[I look at] leanness, how much fat is around it. Also the color.*

*I don’t want bloody packages.*

*Not brown . . .*

*I do look at that little expiration date. Though now I've seen the reports that they actually change that date.*

When it comes to dairy, it's the expiration date these respondents look for first. Many say they always look for the package with the longest time remaining until that expiration date. Brand is also key when it comes to dairy products – much more so than with meat and poultry.

*[I look at] the expiration date. If it's even close that scares me.*

*Brand, because my family loves the Land of Lakes American cheese. Nothing else comes close.*

*I always buy Morning Glory milk. I don't care how much it costs. The other stuff doesn't seem to stay fresh as long.*

*My kids complain about the taste if I buy Walmart milk. They say it tastes plastic-y.*

**Healthy is the goal – but not at the expense of taste.** Whether it's meat, poultry or dairy, these respondents say they tend to look for foods they think are healthy for their families. Most say they look at fat content when they buy. Many look to the label for sodium and fiber information. A few of these respondents say they look for meat, poultry and dairy products that are labeled hormone and antibiotic free. In the end, though only one of these respondents said they consistently pick healthy over taste if they have to make that choice.

*We try to use more ground turkey, not because we're worried about ground beef, but because the turkey is healthier.*

*I do look at the fat content. If the taste is the same and the fat is lower in one, I will always pick that.*

*Taste is important to us. For instance we found that Cub has a wonderful filet. Now we go there because it's a great price and it tastes good.*

**Convenience and price matter.** Ease of use and price don't always get top billing when it comes to product selection, but they are key factors in choice of cut and product selection. Special occasions are the exception to this rule. When these respondents are making a meal for guests or celebrating a special occasion they say they are more likely to spend the extra money and time to make a great meal.

*I buy the chicken skinned, boned – the less I have to do to it the better.*

*I don't buy frozen meat because defrosting it is one more step I have to do before I eat it.*

*I always try to find a happy medium between quality and price. You can go to Woodlands and get really cheap meat but you might as well eat the package.*

*I do stock up on good meat when it's on sale.*

**Many respondents have bought meat and poultry direct from farmer but problems surface.** Several participants in each of these groups currently buy meat and poultry from farmers or have bought product that way in the past. Most express satisfaction with the actual product. The problem, they say, is that they either can't eat all the meat before it begins to get old *or* they end up with a bunch of cuts they don't want. Some say they quit buying meat this way when prices went up for processing.

*We used to get a ½ cow from a family member, but now that it's just my wife and me we just can't eat that much meat before it gets old.*

*I get chickens from my Dad, but I still buy the frozen chicken breast and wings for when we want something quick.*

*We used to buy direct from the farmer to save money. You would get the whole thing for the same price per pound you paid for hamburger. Now you're better off to go to the store and just buy the cuts you want.*

**Corporate giant or local farmer, trust is lacking.** With a few exceptions, these respondents aren't particularly trusting of the corporations currently providing their food products. They've seen too many Dateline NBC and 20/20 reports to believe they can feel comfortable that what they see is what they get when it comes to grocery shopping.

*I do look at that little expiration date. Though now I've seen the reports that they actually change that date.*

This same level of skepticism appears to apply to the local farmer. Even many of these respondents who say they shop farmers markets and roadside stands say they simply won't consider buying meat, poultry or dairy this way. They say they have no way of knowing how the food is produced and processed and whether it meets standards for safety. And what if the product is bad, they ask. They don't see any recourse for tainted or just plain bad tasting products.

*I think there's a perception that if you go and deal directly with the farmer that you aren't assured the same kind of quality control. If you go to Hy-Vee you think that the USDA has checked that and that if you get sick you will have some recourse.*

*My husband wanted to buy from a farmer, but I said we don't even know this person. It's bad enough going to Cub.*

*I like this idea of the guy in the white coat who works for USDA, he's looking the meat over, he's smelling it . . .*

**Disease and bacteria cause most concern.** While many of these respondents say they worry about the use of hormones and antibiotics, the hands-down winners when it comes to worrying about food safety are e-coli, salmonella, mad cow disease and other illness causing bacteria. Several of these respondents say they look for hormone-free and antibiotic-free products and many say they buy organic food when it's available and not priced prohibitively, but nearly all these respondents *worry* about diseases caused by meat. Many say they don't see how buying from a local farmer is going to prevent these concerns.

*I'm always concerned about salmonella. I have a friend who told me to beware of a certain brand of chicken because they have poor processing.*

*I think you'd have to be living under a rock if you haven't heard about this big beef recall.*

*I don't even trust the FDA, the only thing I trust is temperature [to kill the bacteria].*

*Because of the scares there are other meats I buy now because I don't want to worry about e-coli.*

*I don't eat that much meat anymore. I'm almost a vegetarian and it's only because of all these scares.*

**Pick a name, any name – it's the definition that matters.** While these respondents do have favored terms for the production technique outlined in these discussions (see section III), what they really need is a commonly understood definition of the term when it's used to label a product. The problem, they say, is that all the terms presented – free range, grass fed, pasture raised, natural – mean different things to different people.

*I just see buzzwords on the package that don't mean anything. . . . When you see pasture raised, we would all have five different meanings.*

*It would mean more if you saw a marketing campaign that explained the standards for pasture raised.*

**Standards must be set and kept.** The single most consistent finding of these focus groups is the need for a well-publicized standard for pasture raised products. These respondents say in addition to having a definition for the term (see above), they need to know there is a set of standards and a verification process for meeting those standards.



*If there are standards or certifications that let us know how the product is produced. If there was an assurance that they are doing what they are saying [I would feel comfortable buying from a direct source].*

*And that certification needs to be by a non-biased organization.*

**Identity is essential.** With so many products on the market and so many questions about quality on the minds of these participants, they say a “brand” is key to helping promote pasture raised products. Several of these respondents refer to the “Real” label they see on dairy products. They say a similarly well-publicized label for pasture raised products that meet established standards (see above) would raise their confidence in the product and make them more likely to buy.

*If it comes out under several brand names, make sure there’s a slogan that links them.*

**Many respondents say consumers suffer from information overload.** Many of these respondents say the bad news about food is coming at them from every direction. First it’s fat, then it’s red meat, next it’s disease. And what about animal welfare and all those hormones and antibiotics? Should I feed my child fish because it’s low fat or do I have to worry about mercury? These respondents say it’s not that they want to ignore these warnings, it’s just that they don’t know which are legit and which are first-time, small-scale studies that might be refuted in the long run. Some say they just have to trust that they’re making the right decisions and that the USDA and their grocers will make sure their food is safe.

*If you listen to the news everyday you hear about a study that proves something is going to kill you. It just goes on and on. But if you hear the same thing over and over and it’s a reputable organization like the American Medical Association and it’s a long-term study, that makes a difference.*

**Key benefits must be for the consumer.** Most of these respondents say they do care about animal welfare – they don’t want to see meat, poultry and dairy animals kept in unnecessarily cruel conditions. Several respondents say they won’t eat veal because of the way it is produced. Still, they say, in the end the attributes to pasture raised production they most want to hear about are those that directly benefit them and their families (i.e., lower fat, less stress makes better tasting food, less chemicals, etc.).

*I like lamb but my wife won’t let me cook it. She has a problem with the baby thing.*

*I want to know that it tastes better and that it’s healthy for me.*

**Respondents aren't quick to see environmental benefits.** Almost none of these respondents are able to name the environmental benefits of pasture raised production. "Manure management" just isn't in their vocabulary. Even when this benefit is pointed out to them, they struggle to see the benefit. Several respondents point out that whether confined or in the pasture these animals produce the same amount of manure. So, they ask, what is the difference?

**Some see the benefit to family farmers.** A few of these respondents mention supporting their local farmers as a key benefit to buying pasture raised products. Nearly all of these respondents say that if a product meets a defined standard and is labeled "locally produced" they are much more likely to try it.

*I want to support a family farmer and not some huge farm co-op.*

*I would pick up a package that said "locally produced."*

#### **IV. Response to Terms and Technique in General**

This bears repeating – regardless of the term used, these respondents insist on a uniform definition for that term (see section II). While each of these terms raises questions for respondents, they consistently wonder three things:

- How do I know what this term *really* means?
- What standards are in place for products that carry this label?
- Who is making sure those standards are being met?

#### **Reaction to terms**

Respondents in these groups were asked to offer their impressions of the following terms. They were also asked how this term, if they were to see it on a meat, poultry or dairy product, would affect their perception of the product's value.

**Free range:** Many of these respondents have pretty clear ideas about this term. They say they largely associate the term with chickens, but some mention western range fed cattle. While some participants offer positive thoughts on the term, most of these respondents say this term adds little or no value to the product. A few say it might reduce the value of the product as the term has negative connotations for them.

*The way nature intended.*

*I see tough, stringy little chickens.*

*Chickens running around picking stones off the ground.*

*My dad raises free range chickens and you can tell the difference. The color of the eggs is so much nicer and they taste great.*

*More expensive.*

*Maybe fresher.*

*In a New York restaurant it might raise value, but not for me.*

**Pasture raised:** Cows – both dairy and beef – come to mind for nearly all these participants. Some mention rolling green hills, others say they see the “traditional” family farm. Overall, these respondents say seeing this term on a product will, at a minimum, catch their attention.

*More care is given.*

*They'll have less stress, doesn't that change the way it tastes?*

*That makes me think of a family farm.*

*This has a much more positive image.*

*I would be intrigued. It wouldn't be something you would normally see.*

**Grass fed:** Much like pasture raised, this term brings cows to mind and elicits many positive comments from respondents. However, participants appear to be just a bit more confused by the term and seem to express more concern about taste when it comes to beef cattle. This confusion likely affects product value when the term is used.

*What's the difference between this and pasture raised?*

*It's a positive for me because grass is natural.*

*I would think it would be a little tougher. Grain makes meat more tender.*

*Definitely going to taste different.*

*I'm not sure how you would make it strictly grass.*

*I think you're going to get the impression of the natural farmer vs. the farmer that's raising them in a pen and throwing grain down their throats.*

*It would scare me because it's an unknown term.*

**Natural:** While many respondents say they know what natural *should* mean, many say the word is little more than a marketing term these days. And, it's a term they don't always trust.

*Fresh.*

*No chemicals.*

*Without growth hormones, maybe organic.*

*More flavorful because it doesn't have all these pesticides in it.*

*It might prompt me to take a look at the label and see if the label backs it up.*

*Natural according to what?*

*It's kind of like "new and improved".*

*Not much value, it's overused these days.*

### **Reaction to pasture raised technique**

Once participants had a chance to respond to the terms noted above, they were presented a definition of the type of production to which these terms might refer. That description read as follows:

"Generally they refer to techniques used to produce meat, poultry and dairy products with a focus on feeding and raising the animals on pasture (grass-fed diets) as opposed to raising animals in highly confined and concentrated facilities."

Respondents were asked to create a list of **benefits** to this type of production. Those benefits, as respondents see them, include in no particular order:

- More humane to the animal;
- Healthier for the animal which is healthier for consumers;
- Less toxins caused by stress makes it taste better;
- Less disease;
- Fewer chemicals (antibiotics and hormones);
- Lower likelihood of contamination from manure (reduced e-coli risk);
- Animals get more care;

- Food seems more wholesome;
- More natural production method; and
- Lower fat content in meat.

These respondents indicate the description and terms noted above also raise some **concerns** related to this method of production. The include:

- Uncertainty about how product is regulated;
- Quality of pasture (Could it be contaminated or weedy?);
- Effect of grass-based diet on taste of product;
- Effect of grass-based diet on texture of product (meats);
- Potential ingestion of manure before it is fully decomposed;
- Uncertainty about supplemental feed (What is it?);
- Increased cost due to lower volume; and
- What about pork – it isn't a "pasture" animal, is it?

The concern which sparked the most discussion during these groups is related to the pasture raised animal's free access to food. Many of the respondents say they are very uncomfortable with the idea of the animal being free to eat anything it comes across. They say that could include anything from noxious weeds that might affect the taste of the meat, poultry or dairy product to potentially toxic materials.

*If it's wandering around, what does it eat? Those people who are concerned about pesticides but don't worry about what it's eating . . .*

*I would wonder if it were gamey.*

*In the pasture, you're going to have all kinds of weeds.*

*That's why my husband doesn't like chicken because he sees them on the farm picking up everything.*

*It raises a concern for me, seeing them eat everything.*

### **Preferred Term**

When asked to select one of the four terms presented during the focus group to best represent the type of production described *and* the benefits they've mentioned, most of these respondents agree that "pasture raised" is the term. However, pasture raised is by no means the unanimous choice. All these terms – including the ambiguous "natural" – got at least one nod from a participant.

Respondents in at least two of these groups also mentioned "home-raised" and "farm-raised" as terms that might fit with both the benefits they see and the technique as it was described to them.

**Interpretive note:** While these respondents don't come right out and say it, it seems likely that pasture raised gets their vote because term implies some intervention by the farmer while still meeting the "less confined" criteria that appeals to them. Many speak nostalgically of pasture.

*Green rolling hills with white fences.*

*The typical Wisconsin scene with the cows on the green grass.*

Yet pasture also means that at some point the cows come home, the chickens go to the roost, the farmer will oversee that evening meal of corn, mixed grain or hay.

I suspect these same thoughts led some to suggest the more personal terms "home-raised" or "farm-raised." These terms also appear to solve the problem of which animals pasture raised refers to – many of these respondents say pasture raised is fine for cows and can work for chickens but just doesn't seem right for addressing pork production.

However, for definition-starved respondents, these even more vague terms create additional marketing dilemmas. If they aren't sure what pasture raised means, how can they possibly know what home-raised or farm-raised means? And how do we appropriate these broad generic terms for the brand identity they say they need?

Perhaps the better question is this: Who would have thought the dairy folks would take a word as broad as "real" and turn it into a logo so closely identified with milk that most of us recognize the symbol instantly?

With the proper treatment – and the standards to back it up – these words hold similar potential for pasture raised products.

## **V. Opportunities and Barriers to Marketing Pasture Raised Products**

### **General Opportunities and Barriers**

Several of our key findings indicate there are many potential **opportunities** for farmers marketing pasture raised products. They include:

- Most respondents are open to trying these products given the appropriate incentive.
- Participants care about providing quality food to their families and search out healthy options;
- These participants are able to identify the benefits of pasture raised products with little real information about the product;
- Support for local producers is strong in these groups;

- Several of these respondents have had positive experiences with farm raised products purchased through local producers; and
- Respondents do express some concern for animal well-being.

These groups also reveal several potential **barriers** producers must work to overcome in order to take full advantage of the opportunities. They include:

- Lack of trust in unknown sources – particularly those that they see as unregulated or lacking set standards;
- Expectation that pasture raised products will cost more;
- Expectation of increased or superior quality of product to justify cost;
- Concerns about how pasture raised technique will affect taste of products;
- Respondent need for convenience both in access to food and food preparation; and
- Respondent resistance to buying in bulk and the related concern that they will need to buy cuts of meat they don't want in order to get those they do.

### **Opportunities and Barriers by Region**

For the most part, very few differences exist between respondent attitudes according to region. Exceptions include:

- Respondents in Waterloo, Stephens Point, Rochester and, to some extent, Des Moines appear to be slightly more open to buying direct from a producer;
- Respondents in Waterloo and Rochester appear to be more likely to see price as a factor when choosing products; and
- When it came to seeing the environmental benefits of pasture raised techniques, the Des Moines group was the only group to address it on their own without prompting.

## **VI. Message Development**

When it comes right down to it, these respondents say the message they need to hear is one of **healthy, tasty food** for their family. They like the idea that they can get that food and still support a method of production that promotes animal well-being and protects the environment. But, when forced to choose a message that motivates them, they say it's all about **convenient access to healthy, good tasting food at a reasonable price**.

Respondents were asked to review a hand out with messages for promoting pasture raised meat, poultry and dairy products. They were asked to review each message and gauge the likelihood of that message motivating them to further explore a pasture raised product (see tallied hand out in the appendix).

These participants indicate that an effective message promoting pasture raised products must include the following elements:

- Brief and to the point.  
An example: *We pasture animals to produce a superior quality meat product.*
- Easy to understand.  
An example: *Our chickens are free range birds and their feed is free of antibiotics.*
- Direct benefits to the customer.  
An example: *Our poultry has much less fat and tastes wonderful.*

And while they respond to a certain amount of visual imagery (i.e., raised naturally in the fresh air and sunshine), they express skepticism at those messages they view as making unsupportable claims, those that paint too pretty of a picture, and those that use comparison-based words like “better” or “healthier”.

*This sounds like an ad exec in New York thought it up. Protects our environment? Have you ever been on a farm? Do you know what you're talking about? Prove it. (Meat, message #2)*

*This almost sounds silly, it's just too much. (Poultry message #1)*

*Better than what? I don't like to see that word.*

Many respondents also reject those messages that focus too much on the animal's living conditions.

*I'm just not that concerned with whether the chicken gets to walk around during its life or go outside, just tell me they aren't confined. That's enough for me.*

*Less fat, tastes wonderful. I want to know what it means to me.*

Respondents were asked to circle the words and phrases that work for them and cross out those that don't (see Message Key Words and Phrases table in the appendix) as they worked through the message hand out. As one might expect, many of the same words and phrases appear in both the positive and negative columns – each participant responds to these messages in a personal way. That said, there are some key words and phrases which clearly fall into the “+” column. They include:

- Tastes great, tastes wonderful, good tasting . . .;
- Fresh;
- Excellent source of nutrition;
- Good for you;
- Healthy;
- Free of antibiotics;



- Free of hormones;
- Chemical free:
- Low-fat; and
- High quality, superior quality.

Many respondents say there are some words and phrases referring to the conditions in which the animals are kept that also work. But their responses indicate they don't need too much information about these conditions. They include:

- Not confined;
- Fresh air;
- Sunshine;
- Fresh grass; and
- High quality pasture.

**Interpretive note:** As noted above, these respondents do want to know that the meat, poultry and dairy products they eat are raised with concern for animal well-being. However, their responses indicate they aren't concerned enough to want a narrative about the animals' living conditions.

It's also interesting to note, that many of the words and phrases they find appealing related to animal living conditions are not just linked to the animal well-being, but also provided conditions which they perceive to raise the quality of the product.

## **VII. Communication and Marketing Strategies**

When asked to provide feedback on the best way to reach them with information about pasture raised products, these respondents offer two broad areas:

- News coverage (i.e., TV, radio, newspaper, news magazines, etc.)
- Traditional advertising

Many of these respondents say they first need to see news coverage and other information that helps them understand what pasture raised *means*. Then they think they would be more likely to pay attention when they see or hear an advertisement or piece of promotional material.

### **Response to Specific Advertising/Communications Tools**

As expected, these respondents offer many different opinions regarding the most effective attention-getting tools. In general, however, they say the more accessible the information or advertising is, the more likely they are to pay attention. Trusting the information, they say, is a different matter. Most of these respondents say they want to be able to sample a product or get a discount on the first order so they don't have too much invested in something they might not like.

Respondents say **Local (community) newspapers** work because they offer local news and information. This is where these respondents say they would expect to see a feature on a pasture raised product producer in their area. They also turn to these papers for food and grocery advertisements and coupons. Note: Respondents in more urban areas mention local suburban newspapers as a source of information and useful advertisements and coupons.

Many of these respondents say they do pay attention to **traditional advertising** (i.e., TV, radio, newspaper, magazine). Most say any ad that included the key message of convenient, healthy, good tasting food would cause them to pay attention. Their responses indicate that television and newspaper advertising are the most likely to reach them.

The idea of seeing a **pasture raised label** on their food products is one that really works for these respondents – assuming they know what the label means and what the standards are. They say if they know they can trust this label, they won't be so leery when it comes to buying pasture raised products from non-traditional sources like direct from the farmer, at the farmers market, etc.

**Direct mail** gets mixed reviews from these respondents. Some participants say they would welcome a postcard or flyer with information on pasture raised products and how to purchase the product. But, they say, a coupon or discount offer is needed to encourage them to actually follow through and make the purchase. Other respondents say all their direct mail pieces go straight to the trash – though they concede that a prominent coupon might give them pause.

These respondents don't see the **Internet** as a good first contact for information on pasture raised products. Some respondents say they would go to the Web for more information once they've seen a compelling advertisement or heard a news story that gets their attention. Only a few of these respondents indicate an interest in actually ordering food online.

**Billboards** are okay, these respondents say, as long as they aren't the first wave of communication. Most respondents say they do pay attention to billboards that promote a product or service, but when it comes to pasture raised products they need a little background before a traditional ad works. They say a billboard isn't going to provide enough information to motivate them to go find out more.

**Flyers and displays** are good ways to attract their attention, but most respondents concede they will be most effective in grocery stores that may or may not carry pasture raised products. These respondents also recommend using flyers and displays to spread the word at butcher shops, farmers markets and specialty stores – all places they visit at least occasionally.

These respondents say the most effective communication tool is **word of mouth**. Nearly all of these respondents say they are very likely to try a product if a friend or family member recommends it. And, perhaps more importantly, they say they **trust** these recommendations.

### **VIII. Recommendations and Strategies**

It's important to note that focus group research is not scientific – these findings cannot be projected to a larger population. The following recommendations and strategies are based on the comments of these focus groups respondents.

#### General Recommendations:

- Explore options for a co-op marketing campaign that would develop and publicize general standards for pasture raised products.
- Consider developing a corresponding logo/label independent producers can use on their packaging and in advertisements. Cooperating producers would be required to meet general standards before using logo/label.
- Develop a public awareness campaign for logo/label.
- Create do-it-yourself marketing kits with sample advertisements, press releases, etc.

#### Recommendations for Individual Producer Marketing Efforts:

- Consider promoting word of mouth advertising for your current customers. Offer a free product or discount for each new customer they send your way.
- Provide current customers with additional product lists or first-time customer discount coupons they can give friends and family.
- Look for opportunities to promote your product in local newspapers. For instance if there is a national story on food safety, contact your local paper and let them know how your product is making a difference.
- Consider taking the plunge and advertise in local/community papers. Ads are typically low cost and reach a large portion of the community.
- Promote your local ties in all advertising.
- Explore options for coupons and/or discounts when advertising – particularly in newspaper and direct mail.

- Explore taste-testing options for potential customers. These might include a booth at the local community festival, the county fair, holiday celebrations, etc.
- Always have samples on hand when promoting your product at farmers markets or roadside stands.
- Consider placing more focus on the “healthy” attributes of your product (i.e., lower fat, less/no chemicals, etc.).
- Consider minimizing – but not excluding – mention of animal well-being and placing the focus on benefits to your customer.
- Remember to use clear, easy to understand terms when promoting your product. Avoid using overly technical or industry specific terms.
- Explore packaging and bundle options that allow customers more choice of cuts and quantity. Emphasize these options in your promotional materials.
- Consider forming partnerships with local meat markets and specialty stores to provide some products for resale, but also as a conduit for customers looking for high quality, healthy meat and poultry.
- Explore ways to make access to the product as convenient as possible while still maintaining consistency and a sense of professionalism. For instance consider home delivery schedules that allow customers to know exactly when their product must be ordered for deliver on a specific day, etc.
- Work to become more visible in your community to raise the level of trust for potential clients.
- Emphasize your experience and longevity in farming whenever possible.
- Consider setting and publishing your own standards for production *and* customer satisfaction. Let potential customers know they have recourse should a product fail to meet their expectations.