



# British chicken factsheet

## Did you know?

- Around 830 million chickens are produced in the UK each year
- The total value of UK poultry meat production is £1.4 billion (2008 NFU & Defra figures)

Prices stated in this factsheet are correct at time of printing (22 January 2009).

## The 'tiered' marketplace

The UK poultry industry (farmers and processors) is responsible for supplying fresh poultry meat to consumers through supermarkets, restaurants and other outlets. By concentrating on the high-quality fresh market, UK poultry farmers have developed world-leading standards of food safety, animal welfare and environmental protection. UK consumers have come to love UK chicken and research suggests they actively look for the Red Tractor - the leading UK food quality logo.

If you buy fresh chicken at the supermarket, you will notice various 'tiers' or 'ranges' of meat are available. These range from non-assured imports to assured UK produced meat, from indoor conventional systems supplying the standard and value end of the market to enhanced broiler systems, with lower stock densities and slower growing varieties, such as RSPCA Freedom Food. Then there's free range and organic meat. This 'tiered' marketplace has allowed consumers to select meat matching their budget and ethical beliefs.

## Which Chicken to Chose?

Celebrity chefs, the media and even your friends and family will have a view on how chickens should be kept and, subsequently, which type you should buy. But often the most important factor when feeding the family is price. We've set out what the standards mean and a guide to the typical supermarket cost for a 2kg medium whole chicken and for a skinless breast fillet 400g pack.

### Organic



The most expensive chicken to produce is the organic bird, which accounts for less than 1% of retail sales. This will have been kept free range, which means during the majority of their life (once they are old enough to go outside) birds have unrestricted daytime access to organic fields.

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Produced for Great British Chicken by National Farmers' Union

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NFU, Agriculture House, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire CV8 2TZ  
Tel: 02476 858500 Fax: 02476 858501





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These birds will be fed an organic cereal-based diet which is more expensive than non-organic feed and they will have been matured to at least 70 days before slaughter. Organic chicken is audited to standards such as the Soil Association organic scheme.

Whole Bird: £11.62 or £5.81/kg

Skinless Breast: £6.98 or £17.44/kg

## Free range



Likely to be less expensive than organic, but more expensive than indoor reared chicken, these birds will also have had access to pasture during the day for most of their lives. Free range chicken accounts for about 3% of retail sales. Birds are fed a cereal-based diet and are also matured more slowly, to around 56 days. Most free range meat is audited to Red Tractor standards for food safety, can be traced back to the farm and also meets RSPCA Freedom Food standards for specific animal welfare criteria.

Whole Bird: £8.48 or £4.24/kg

Skinless Breast: £5.90 or £14.74/kg

## Enriched environment indoor



Various systems exist, such as Freedom Food indoor and some retailers' own brands, where birds are kept in sheds or barns but where stocking densities are around 20% lower than conventional indoor methods. Forms of environmental enrichment are included, such as toys to peck, straw bales to perch on and windows for natural light, and birds are matured to around 56 days.

Meat from these farms is generally less expensive than free range but more expensive than conventionally produced chicken. It accounts for almost 10% of retail sales. Research suggests families will buy a Freedom Food-style bird as a special occasion alternative to the conventional chicken they eat on an

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everyday basis. Most enriched environment indoor birds are audited to Red Tractor standards for food safety, can be traced back to farm and also meet RSPCA standards for specific animal welfare criteria.

Whole Bird: £6.98 or £3.49/kg

Skinless Breast: £4.99 or £12.49/kg

### Assured - Red Tractor



More than 85% of fresh chicken bought in supermarkets is produced to Red Tractor standards. Red Tractor standards are independently audited to assure customers that chicken is produced safely, and with the welfare of chickens in mind. The standards require production methods, stocking rates and staff training above and beyond legal requirements.

Chicken carrying the Red Tractor and Union Jack logo has been farmed and processed in the UK. If you don't want to pay extra for Freedom Food, free range or organic chicken, the Red Tractor ensures you are still buying an ethically-produced chicken, and that you are buying British. In the supermarkets you will often see the Red Tractor on 'value' own-brand chicken and on their 'standard' own brand chicken. When buying standard or value chicken always look for the Red Tractor or Union Jack logo - because not all countries operate to the high UK standards of production and assurance.

#### Standard

Whole Bird: £5.88 or £2.94/kg

Skinless Breast: £4.28 or £10.70/kg

#### Value

Whole Bird: £3.78 or £1.89/kg

Skinless Breast: £2.88 or £7.19/kg

## More about the Red Tractor

Retail sales of poultry meat in the UK are worth in the region of £3.7bn, £2.9bn of which is bought in the major supermarkets. Approximately 65% of major retailer sales carry the Red Tractor quality assurance logo (above). The Red Tractor is an independent mark of quality that guarantees the food we're buying comes from farms and food companies that meet high standards of food safety and hygiene, animal welfare and environmental protection. See the Red Tractor website: [www.redtractor.org.uk](http://www.redtractor.org.uk) for more information.

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## More about the industry

The government is in the process of changing welfare legislation. In the poultry meat sector, the EU Broiler Welfare Directive has recently been introduced and will be implemented by Defra in the UK in June 2010. This sets legal maximum stocking densities - which the Red Tractor scheme already more than meets. The industry is constantly evolving to improve the quality and value of its produce in response to consumer demand. This process has shaped the industry we see today.

The latest development within the industry has been the Poultry Passport initiative. The Poultry Passport is a centrally held skills database of poultry workers. An up-to-date record of individual workers' training and experience is recorded and logged, so that employers and official bodies can be sure all staff involved in caring for farmed birds have the necessary skills to ensure welfare standards.

Poultry farmers take pride in their work and will tell you that skilled stockmanship, attention to detail and a passion for the industry are the key ingredients for high-quality poultry farming. The industry is always improving these skills to ensure the welfare of poultry, irrespective of production system, is world-leading.

## Summary

British poultry farmers are proud to provide a wide range of quality assured, value for money products. Bird welfare is central to that. In all systems, welfare is guaranteed by science-based legal requirements, supplemented by standards set by the industry and welfare organisations, to meet the changing demands of consumers.

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