

## Food Alliance rolls out national sustainable pork standard

Certification group seeks to keep the bar high on animal welfare systems

by *Sustainable Food News*

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Sustainable food certifier Food Alliance Thursday unveiled a comprehensive national standard for pork production with strict criteria for raising and treating hogs.

“Animal welfare is a hot topic among buyers and consumers,” Scott Exo, Food Alliance’s executive director, told **Sustainable Food News**.

The Portland, Ore.-based nonprofit operates the most comprehensive third-party certification program in North America for sustainably produced food.

The group certifies farms, ranches and food processors for sustainable agricultural and production practices including safe and fair working conditions, reduction of pesticide use and toxicity, healthy and humane care for livestock, no genetically modified crops or livestock and no hormones or non-therapeutic antibiotics.

While animal welfare is just one component of the group’s sustainability standards – it already had a pork standard in place targeted at small-scale pork operations – Food Alliance expanded the animal welfare criteria for certification to provide a “higher level of specificity of how we define humane treatment,” Exo said.

But the push to beef up its pork production standards was also to allow more medium-size, commercial-scale operations access the burgeoning natural foods retail and foodservice markets while still setting a high bar for meaningful sustainable practices.

Exo said there are numerous small- and medium-sized, family pork producers in the Midwest, and a “resurgence” of like-sized pork producing operations on the West Coast increasingly interested in serving these markets, while adhering to “changing consumer expectations for animal welfare.”

Businesses that meet Food Alliance’s standards are allowed to use its green eco-label to claims for social and environmental responsibility, which differentiates products and can strengthen brands.

The 28-page [Inspection Tool for Pork Production](#) is now available to be downloaded, and includes both fixed and scored standards addressing issues such as humane treatment, manure management, and food safety.

Pork producers must meet eight fixed criteria, including not using feed additive antibiotics or growth hormone treatments. Animals also must have at least seven hours of daylight everyday.

Food Alliance certification bans the use of gestation crates, where sows are kept during their four-month pregnancy. Typically sows have little room to stand up and lie down in these metal crates, and many are denied bedding so the hogs are forced to stand on slatted or grated floors designed to let urine and feces fall through.

The Food Alliance criteria also bans the use of small farrowing crates, another small metal cage where pregnant sows give birth and nurse their young usually from a week before giving birth until their piglets are weaned three to four weeks later. Food Alliance standards do allow farrowing crates, but they must be five-by-seven feet or larger.

Exo said such restrictions are examples of that “higher level of specificity” contained in the standards.

Food Alliance also expanded certification criteria for the management of animal waste, which can have a major impact on ground and surface water.

Food Alliance's first inspection under the revamped pork production standards took place last week at an "exemplary" hog operation in Washington, Exo said. He declined to name the operation seeking certification until the inspector's findings are finalized.

Food Alliance is also overhauling its existing sustainable agriculture standards as well as starting work on developing a standard for sustainable poultry production, Exo said.

About 270 farms and ranches in 18 U.S. states and one Canadian province are certified as sustainable by Food Alliance. These producers manage over four million acres of range and farm land, raising beef, lamb, pork, dairy products, mushrooms, dried beans and lentils, wheat, and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

Food Alliance has certified 13 handling operations, including nine fruit/vegetable processors, a cheesemaker, and three business units of a major Pacific Northwest produce distributor.