



"Why everyone should consider eating slow growing, standard bred chickens!"
By Jim Adkins, Founder of SPN-USA

Are you aware of what kind of chicken you buy at the local grocery store? Whole Foods? Or even at your local farmers market? Do you know where it came from and the environment was it grown in? These are all questions that many people are asking. Let me help you.

After working for several years in the commercial poultry industry, I learned a lot about the chicken you eat and the turkeys you buy at Thanksgiving! Many of you have seen documentaries, watched the movie, *Food INC* or read Michael Pollan's book, *Omnivores Dilemma* – it is all accurate when it comes to commercial poultry. There is an alternative, an exciting alternative! First let me tell you the bad news, I want you to learn to discern the difference between good chicken and bad chicken!

In the late forties, some of the greatest poultry geneticists engineered a fast growing chicken known throughout the world as a *Cornish Cross*. Since then, this bird completely consumes the marketplace, it is served in almost every restaurant (even the fancy ones!) and even has the wonderful label of *USDA Certified Organic* on its package.

Fast Growth: This bird grows at an unnatural, abnormally fast rate! In 1950 it gained three pounds in ten weeks, in 1980, it gained four pounds in eight weeks and in 2011, it grew to six pounds in six weeks. Today the average processing age of the Cornish Cross chicken is thirty seven days! For those of you who have never raised a baby chick, that is way too fast. If we humans grew at this same rate, we would weigh 260 pounds by the time we were two years old! That is not normal.

Terminal & Genetically Controlled: This fast growing meat chicken was never meant to live for very long! They were meant to be slaughtered at a young age. They are bred by several “*combined breeding lines*” with the intention of the end product not being able to reproduce. The genetics of these birds are “owned” by the largest, commercial poultry producers in the world. Their goal is to produce a bird that farmers cannot reproduce, which requires them to continuously go back to the breeding source for more birds. These birds cannot reproduce on small, local farms.

Physical Complications: Because of the rapid growth of these birds, they have constant physical complications; their bones and organs cannot keep up with the rate of growth. Their legs cannot handle the weight and end up crippled within weeks after hatching. Their hearts cannot pump blood fast enough and often they die of heart failure. Within weeks of their hatch, they have great difficulty walking. When poultry grow at a normal, slow growth rate, it means strong skeletal structure, normal organ development, more muscle and texture to the meat, more nutrient and genetic strength with strong immunities.

Time Increases Nutrition & Flavor: Because these chickens grow so quick, they do not have time to develop texture, muscle and even nutrition. Slower growing birds (which we'll talk about) have more time to grow muscle, they run around on pasture and develop muscles. Ask your great grandmother, she will remind you that the longer a chicken lives the better it will taste! A thirty seven day old chicken does not have time to gain all the juicy flavors that come with slow growth!

Now the good news! (Good news is always better when you know the bad news first) The old historical, heritage, standard breeds of poultry are on their way back! The ones that grow slow, taste really good and can naturally reproduce in your backyard! The ones that our grandmothers loved! The breeds that fed the mouths of American families for hundreds of years before the Cornish Cross came along.

Standard bred (heritage) breeds: All the historical breeds of poultry were developed for a specific purpose in a specific region of the country! Take for example a *Wyandotte*. It was developed in upstate New York. What is the weather like in upstate New York? Yes, the winters are extremely cold! The Wyandotte is a short bodied chicken that has lots of body depth. It was developed for this climate. It was developed as a dual purpose bird for meat and winter egg production. It was meant to be productive and thrive in cold weather. A bird that is uniquely developed for a specific climate for a specific purpose. This is true of all breeds of standard bred poultry. Others American breeds include *New Hampshires*, *Rhode Island Reds*, *Delawares*, *Plymouth Rocks*, *Buckeyes*, *Lamonas* and the Canadian bred *Chantecler*.

Naturally reproduce: As I mentioned earlier, *fast growing, genetically engineered* chickens are terminal and never meant to not live very long! They are not genetically sustainable for the local farmer! Every time a farmer gets a batch of chicks via the USPS, they grow them out, process them all and have to return to the “*controlled genetic source*” to get more birds. This is not the case with standard bred poultry. With these birds, a farmer can develop his own breeding flock! He can be sustainable by developing his own strain of breeders. This makes his flock truly sustainable! When a farmer is able to breed, grow and market his own fowls, he is no longer dependent upon the “*outside resource*” to provide his baby chicks. Another reason why you should buy and eat slow growing poultry.

Outside on pasture: Here is another thought! All these old historical breeds of poultry were bred to be outside on pasture! Many farmers in the pasture poultry movement, are taking *industrialized, commercial poultry* that were developed to grow in confinement and putting them out on pasture! That is not what they were created for! The best birds to raise outside are the old breeds that were meant to be on pasture; they run around, they eat bugs, fruits, grass and even small rodents. It is natural and organic for them to be outside.

They take longer to grow but will taste much better: Remember “*time always increases flavor!*” The longer a chicken is alive, the better it will taste! This is a why Mr. Sanders from KFC has had to add so many spices; fast growing birds are not alive long enough to have any flavor! This means that these old breeds have to be cooked differently. When you buy a local, ready to eat chicken, make sure you ask for instructions on how to cook it because they are completely different. The general rule is, “*low and slow*” – a slow growing bird needs to be cooked longer at a lower temperature.

When you eat these birds, you support a local farm: In 2011, only 27,000 poultry farms raised 8.9 billion broiler meat birds, compared to 1950, 1.6 million farms raised 581million broilers. Within 60 years, the number of small farms have obviously drastically declined! It is sad! But, small farms are on the return! Thousands of American families across North America are returning to raising and eating their own poultry. When you find and local farmer near you to buy meat and eggs, you are supporting a local farm. Every time you buy a *fast growing, industrialized chicken* you are supporting the “*Tyson chicken companies of the world*” - buy from a local farm instead of the industrialized corporate company!

Sustainable, traditional chickens provide security for our food system: Think about this, one in five farm animals are in danger of extinction, according to the *Food and Agriculture Organization*. (FAO) by eating a standard bred, heritage chicken and creating a market for these breeds, you help to ensure these historical breeds are saved from extinction and passed on to the next generation. In addition, our industrialized food system is founded on a narrow genetic base. As new illnesses, diseases, climate changes affect our food system, we need variety to turn to for new solutions. Traditional breeds of chickens provide the genetic diversity needed for a secure food system. They carry such agricultural heritage that have been raised on small farms throughout North America.

Here are the top (3) questions to ask before you buy/eat a chicken!

1. What breed of chicken is this?
2. At what age was this bird slaughtered? (if it is less than twelve weeks, it is not a slow growing breed)
3. Describe to me how this bird was raised? Was it raised on pasture, outside?

As a consumer of chicken, do your homework! Research what you are eating, especially chicken! If you need help more information, please go to our website (www.spnusa.com) we would love to connect you to a local farmer who is raising slow growing standard bred chickens just like the ones that grandma used to raise.

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