

CHOOSING CHICKEN: A SUSTAINABILITY GUIDE FOR CONSUMERS

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Introduction:

The chicken industry is the largest meat producer in the United States. The average American consumes 82 pounds a year, more than tripling the amount consumed 50 years ago. With large demand, chicken production has grown to follow the trend with companies of all size. There are three popular scales of production: large, medium, and local farmers market. Which scale has the least amount of environmental impacts? Which scale should consumers choose to help reduce impacts? Impacts include but are not limited to feed intake, waste management, and air quality. **When purchasing chicken, consumers should stray away from the supermarket to their local farmers market as their chicken is raised the most sustainably.**

Methods:

To find which scale is most sustainable, a literature review of each environmental impact for each respective scale was conducted. Companies yearly report claims were analyzed and compared with other companies in the study. Tyson Foods is a large scale company (producing 5 percent of industry chicken) with its headquarters in Arkansas, while Gold'n Plump is a medium scale company (2 percent) found in St. Cloud, MN. Dancing Bears Company is located near St. Joseph, MN providing food for the St. Joseph and Sartell farmers markets. A qualitative assessment was made to determine which scale had a better rating. In order to determine impacts of chicken sold at a local farmers market an interview was conducted with local producer Jim Degiovanni, owner of Dancing Bears Company. The interview included questions regarding his companies chicken production practices.

Conclusion:

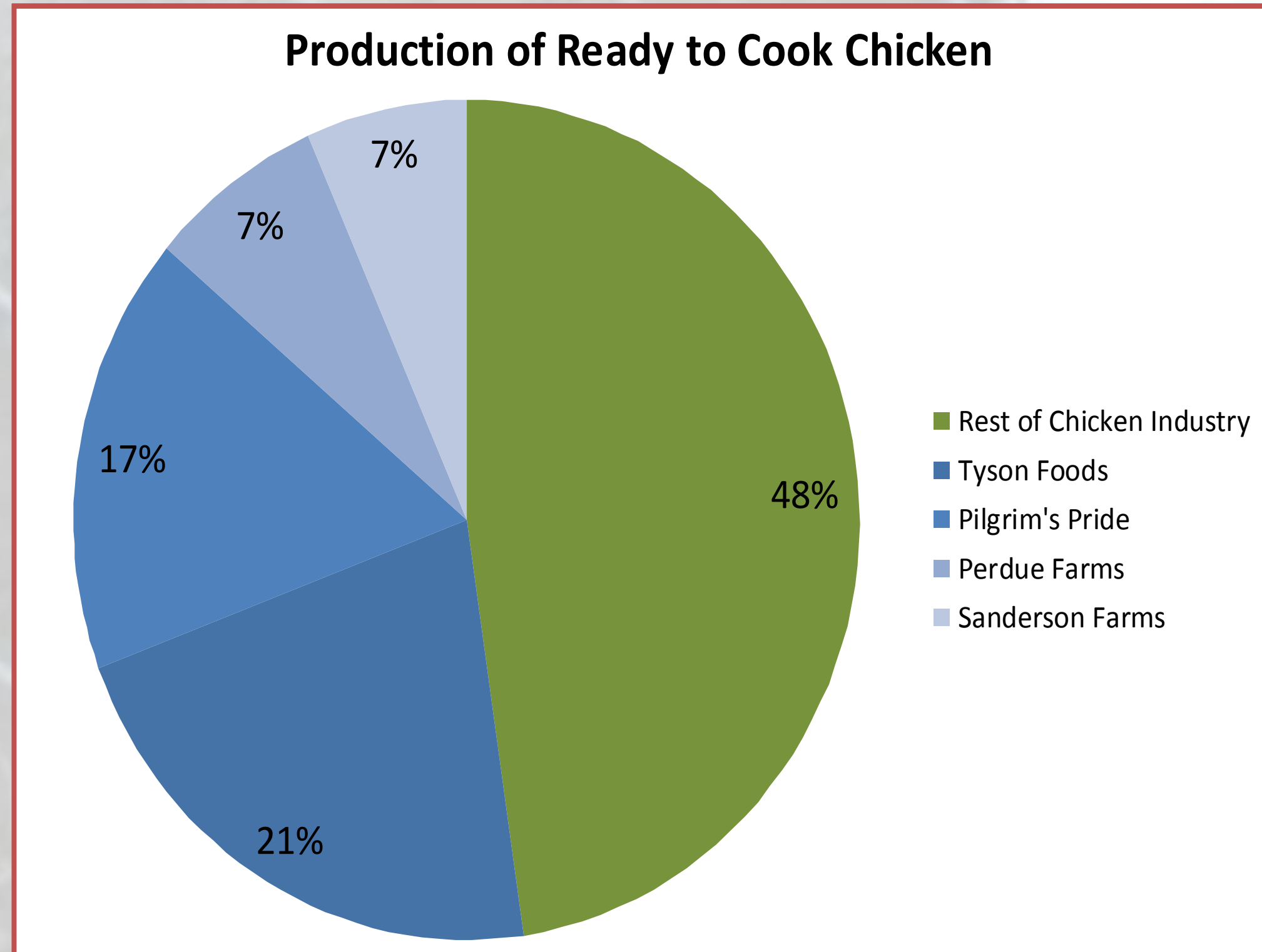
With the consumption of chicken on the rise consumers need to be aware of how their chicken was raised. Although large scale companies donate more resources to public charities and their products are cheaper, their chicken most often contains antibiotics and hormones which can be dangerous for human consumption. Tyson foods also have more lawsuits and complaints against their company pertaining to air quality and animal treatment. Chicken from medium scale producers such as Gold'n Plump have impacts which can be similar to large scale or farmers market producers. **The best choice for consumers wanting to purchase chicken with the least environmental impact is to go their local farmers market.** Most of the waste produced in this scale is applied directly to pastures because chickens range outside during the day, only using shelter at night. Free range chickens also improve the air quality within broiler housing. Chickens at Dancing Bears Company are raised the most humanely as they are not given hormones or antibiotics and are allowed to move around comfortably as most chickens are not allowed to in other scales.

Preference Reflecting Attributes

| | Tyson Foods | Gold'n Plump (JustBARE) | Dancing Bears |
|------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Feed Intake | √ | √ | |
| Waste | | | √ |
| Antibiotics & Hormones | | √ | √ |
| Air Quality | | | √ |
| Ethics | | √ | √ |
| Social Justice | √ | | |
| Price | √ | | |
| Taste | - | - | - |

Resources:

Thornton, Gary. "U.S. Chicken Producers: Increased Volume in 2010." *Watt Poultry USA*, 2011.
Gold'n Plump. "The GNP Company: Farm to Fork Report 2010." 2010.
Tyson Foods Inc. "2009 Sustainability Report: Rooted in Traditions, Growing Responsibly." (2009)



This chart shows the large size of the top four chicken companies which control over half the market.

Author recommendations based on eight concerning environmental impacts. When choosing chicken, Dancing Bears Company would be the best choice if concerned about environmental impacts. Companies marked with an √ have the best rating for that category.

