


Ikea latest chain to announce chicken welfare standards

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Dive Brief:

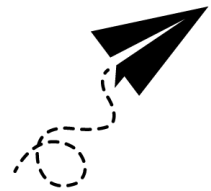
- Ikea Food Services AB has announced welfare requirements for the chickens it sources for retail food products. Its so-called "Better Chicken Programme" is the first of several initiatives the Swedish company — better known for its assemble-your-own furniture — plans to initiate to "improve animal welfare, public health and environmental impacts at the farm level."
- The first set of minimum sourcing standards will have some deadlines by 2020, with final compliance expected by 2025, the company said. Criteria includes certain space requirements for chickens, no routine use of antibiotics and healthier breeds with higher production values.
- "Following two years of research and development, I'm delighted we now are sharing the Better Chicken Programme, the first of our sustainable agriculture initiatives for farm animals, which demonstrates our commitment to driving positive change in the food industry," said Jacqueline Macalister, Ikea's health and sustainability manager, said in a statement.

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This isn't the only sustainability initiative Ikea is working on — the company announced a plan last year to cut food waste at its store cafeterias in half by 2020. According to Fast Company, by May 2017 this approach had been instituted in 20% of Ikea's stores, had reduced nearly 80,000 pounds of food waste and saved the company more than \$1 million.

Ikea's in-store cafes have grown in popularity so much so that an estimated 30% of store visits are made just to dine there, according to the Hartman Group. As of last August, there were 48 Ikea stores in the U.S., making the massive furniture store a destination that requires a mini-road trip for many consumers who appreciate the low-priced Swedish meatballs, salmon fillets and cinnamon rolls.

As its food business has grown, Ikea has joined a litany of other businesses — from drug stores to airports — now competing for consumers' fresh food dollars. According to Business Insider, 650 million people in 48 countries dined at Ikea in 2016, making up about 5% of the company's total revenue. There's even talk that Ikea may launch its own food chain, which would make its sustainability policies even more important to discerning consumers.

Still, the company may have some work to do to convince its critics. Compassion in World Farming, which advocates for improved animal welfare in the food industry, characterized Ikea's broiler program as a step backward from previous commitments. The organization announced in November that nine of Ikea's 11 national divisions in Europe that had signed a pledge for improved chicken farming standards by 2024 had withdrawn from that pledge.

"IKEA's lack of progress towards their higher welfare commitments and their recent decision to withdraw completely from them, is not only disappointing, but a highly retrograde step and completely at odds with the growing movement for higher welfare chicken production both in Europe and the U.S.," said Tracey Jones, director of food business at Compassion in World Farming, in a November 2017 release.

It's hard to say if Ikea's new standards are a dilution of previous ones, and if this might impact the company's bottom line. What can be said, however, is this: As American consumers become increasingly concerned about animal welfare and environmental standards related to their food choices, companies need to make sure they're setting meaningful standards and then sticking to them.