

In Depth: Animal Welfare Approved, a program of A Greener World



AWA Case Studies

This section provides background on Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) and an overview of AWA's:

- Standards
- Certification process
- Audit process
- Label use guidelines
- Marketing support
- Costs

AWA Background

Mission. AWA is a program of A Greener World (AGW) whose goal is to improve farm animal welfare by certifying family farmers who adhere to what AWA describes as “the highest animal welfare and environmental standards.” According to AWA, “[t]he way we raise our animals, the nutritional quality of the meat, milk and eggs they produce, and the impact of farming systems on the environment, are all intrinsically linked.” AWA describes itself as promoting animal welfare, the environment, and public health.

History. The Animal Welfare Institute created AWA in 2006. In 2014, AGW took over responsibility for the program. AGW is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which also manages the certifications Certified Grassfed by AGW and Certified Non-GMO. Notably, AWA is the only animal welfare certification program accredited as meeting the requirements of the International Organization for Standardization's ISO/IEC 17065, which sets forth requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services.



For Family Farmers. AWA certifies and audits independent family farmers and cooperatives and producer groups of family farmers. It also certifies marketing groups, distributors, retailers, and restaurants. AWA defines a “cooperative” as “a group of farmers who work together and market all their produce under one name or brand, mutually benefiting from the profits.” It defines a “producer group” as “a group of farmers who work together but market some of their produce independently of other farmers in the group.”

Standards. According to AWA, “[t]he basic premise of all the standards is that animals must be able to behave naturally and be in a state of physical and psychological well-being.” In turn, as discussed in detail below, AWA’s standards cover birth through slaughter and require that animals have continuous access to pasture or range.

Animals covered. AWA’s standards cover the following animals:

- Bison
- Beef and dairy cows
- Broiler chickens
- Laying hens
- Meat and dairy goats
- Pigs
- Meat and dairy sheep
- Turkeys
- Ducks
- Geese



Where Sold. AWA-certified products can be found for sale on farms and at farmers markets, restaurants, and in retail stores. See **AWA Product Search** for more information.

Looking Forward. According to AWA, the program is focused on obtaining a bigger market share of the animal welfare certification sector, and seeks to accomplish that by providing additional certifications for potential members, including Certified Grassfed (certifying that ruminant animals are fed a 100% grass and forage diet) and Certified Non-GMO (guaranteeing that a food product is produced without the use of genetically engineered feed, supplements or ingredients). AWA states that its profile and membership have been increasing, with an average of approximately ten applications per week.

AWA STANDARDS

Each certification program covered in this guide requires compliance with standards covering various aspects of farm animal husbandry. Below is an overview of how AWA develops its standards; which stages of life AWA's standards cover; and AWA's record-keeping requirements. To review all AWA standards, [click here](#).

Standards Development

AWA states that it developed its standards in collaboration with scientists, farmers, and farm animal welfare experts from around the world. A Standards Board reviews AWA's standards annually and periodically revises them, which is then forwarded on the Standards Board for review. For more information on the standards development process, read the **AWA Policy Manual** (Part 1.14).

Stages of Life Covered

AWA's standards cover birth through death, including breeding, hatching, weaning, on farm life, transport, and slaughter.

Record-Keeping Requirements

AWA's record-keeping standards vary slightly across species. However, AWA generally requires:

A FARM PLAN REGARDING:

- Compliance with AWA standards
- Feeding and water
- Animal health
- Management of pasture
- Emergency procedures
- Transportation

A RECORD OF:

- Traceability, birth to slaughter
- Ingredients for feed
- Any close confinement
- Medication and treatment
- Mortality, morbidity and culling
- Sale or transfer of certified animals or products

Note: Applications for Derogation

A farm or group of farms may apply through a **Derogation Request Form** to carry out a practice or use a substance that AWA standards generally do not permit. According to AWA, derogation is only granted in exceptional cases when the principles of the program are still met even if an individual standard is not.

AWA CERTIFICATION PROCESS

AWA certifies independent family farmers, cooperatives and producer groups of family farmers, and retailers, distributors, and restaurants. The certification process described below applies to independent family farms. For information about certification processes for other entities, review the **AWA Policy Manual**.

STEP ONE

Review AWA Standards & Policies

- Read the **AWA standards** for the species you wish to certify and the **AWA Policy Manual** to confirm your farm will comply with relevant standards and policies.
- Confirm that your slaughter facilities are agreeable to being inspected for compliance by an AWA Slaughter Specialist.

STEP TWO

Submit Application

- Submit an **application form** and signed affidavit to AWA online or by mail.
- **Note:** AWA treats all information supplied by applicants, approved farms, slaughter facilities, or other businesses and groups as confidential.

STEP THREE

Schedule & Facilitate an Audit

- After you apply, an AWA Eligibility Coordinator will contact you to discuss certification. An AWA auditor will then contact you to schedule a visit to your operation to review your practices, records, facilities, and animals. To learn more about the audit process, see [next page](#).
- **Note:** AWA treats observations and information collected during the course of the audit as confidential.

STEP FOUR

Obtain Certification & Use Label

- The AWA Approvals Board will make a certification determination.
- You will only receive certification if you are 100% compliant with AWA standards.
- Certification is valid for a maximum of 18 months. You may use the AWA label/seal on your products for 18 months from certification notification.
- **Note:** You may appeal a certification decision or enter a dispute resolution process for other program concerns.

STEP FIVE

Recertification & Changes to Certification

- AWA conducts re-certification audits of member farms annually, with a maximum of 18 months between inspections. AWA will notify you of the date by which your next audit is scheduled.
- You are not required to submit an annual application unless there has been a change in the scope of your operation since your last application, in which case you would submit an amended application.
- Once certified, you must inform AWA immediately of any actions or material changes that could affect your ability to comply with the AWA standards, including if you change slaughter plants or start or stop using on-farm slaughter.
- **Note:** your certification may be suspended or terminated for nonconformities, as set forth in the **AWA Policy Manual** (Part 3.4).

AWA AUDIT PROCESS



Step 1
Facilities



Step 2
Animals



Step 3
Records

AWA conducts audits of facilities, animals and records to assess and potentially certify your operation's conformance with AWA standards and policies.

When Are Audits Required?

- **Initially:** AWA conducts an audit as part of the initial application process.
- **Annually:** After certification, AWA conducts audits annually (with a maximum of 18 months between inspections) as a part of certification maintenance.
- **Unannounced:** These may be triggered by major changes in how the farm operates, a complaint against a farm, or to verify that a required change has been made.
- **For Program Assessment:** Periodically, AWA selects random member farms to audit (also unannounced) in order to assess the effectiveness and consistency of the AWA auditing program, as well as the performance of its auditors. Random audits may cover a full farm or just a particular species or management practice.

Who Conducts Audits?

- **Generally:** AWA employs approximately 20 auditors. Auditors are assigned based on availability, geographic location, knowledge, and expertise.
- **Background & Training:** AWA auditors must have an agricultural science degree and be veterinarians or farmers with at least five years experience in pasture-based management or a similar qualification. All auditors are required to attend a "new auditor training." After the initial training, each auditor is accompanied by a more experienced auditor during at least his or her first three audits. Every auditor is also required to attend yearly training programs. AWA Slaughter Specialists also have access to trainings provided by experts at Bristol University, UK.
- **Impartiality:** All AWA staff, auditors, and board members are required to disclose any potential conflicts of interest and adhere to the AWA Conflict of Interest Policy. Further, an auditor is prohibited from conducting three consecutive audits on the same farm.
- **Management Reviews:** In order to maintain the program's compliance with ISO/IEC 17065 (which sets forth requirements for bodies certifying products, processes and services), AWA conducts annual management reviews to evaluate the effectiveness of the auditing program as well as other aspects of the AWA quality management system.

What Happens During an Audit?

The audit process varies somewhat depending on the type of entity being audited. However, all audits are based upon AWA standards and ISO/IEC 17065, if applicable. (For information about the audit and certification process for specific kinds of business entities, review the **AWA Policy Manual** Parts 2 & 3.) Generally, the audit process involves the following steps:

Pre-audit: *Off-farm activity*

- **First contact.** An AWA auditor will contact you to schedule the audit visit. The auditor will ask questions to confirm the scope of the farm activity and the species to be audited and explain and answer questions about the audit process.



Audit Part 1: *On-farm activity*

- **Discussion.** The auditor will meet with farm managers and employees to discuss their roles and responsibilities as well as their knowledge of key AWA requirements.
- **Observation of procedures, facilities, animals.** The audit will observe the farm facilities and practices involved in housing the farm animals (if applicable) and the storage of feed and medicines. The auditor may also arrange to inspect storage and in-store handling of products. The auditor will also observe the animals, their physical condition, and all of the practices involved in raising them. The auditor will carry out some welfare outcome measurements – e.g. body condition score, lameness, dirtiness, as part of the audit. The auditor may also arrange to inspect transport of livestock.
- **Review of Records.** The auditor reviews records related to the source of all meat and livestock products, the management of the farm business and other relevant AWA standards (see record requirements above under “AWA Standards”).
- **Exit Interview.** At the end of the audit, the auditor will meet with you to summarize his or her findings and provide you with an overview of the observed non-conformances, if any. During this meeting, you have the opportunity to provide corrections, clarifications and additional information.
- **Overall length.** The length of the audit varies depending on the size and complexity of the operation. According to AWA, most audits take half a day to one day. Farmers are required to be present and available for the duration of the audit.



Audit Part 2: *Slaughter Facility*

For an animal product to be AWA certified, the accredited animal must be slaughtered in a facility that has undertaken the AWA inspection process and met AWA slaughter standards. The slaughter standards are based off of and exceed the requirements of the **American Meat Institute (AMI) guidelines**. This applies to slaughter on the farm or in a separate plant. Further, an animal may not be transported for more than 8 hours to slaughter. A slaughter facility inspection entails the same steps as a farm audit, described above.

- **Irregular Slaughter:** With either on-farm slaughter operations or slaughter plants, if the slaughter is not regularly conducted throughout the year, the AWA Slaughter Plant Specialist conducting the inspection must be provided with at least one month (three months is preferred) of notice prior to the planned slaughter.
- **Process for a Separate Slaughter Plant:** If your slaughter facility is not on your farm, you must identify to AWA the slaughter facility you wish to use, discuss the AWA program with the facility and help to coordinate the plant inspection by the AWA Slaughter Plant Specialist.
- **Corrections:** If the Slaughter Plant Specialist has any concerns about the suitability of including a plant or on-farm slaughter facility in the AWA program, he or she will provide a list of needed corrections. In some instances, a Slaughter Plant Specialist may decide that a plant or on-farm facility will never be suitable for the AWA program given the extent of nonconformance or the structure of its management.
- **Compliance Confirmation:** The Slaughter Plant Specialist produces a review report and collects any corrective actions required of the plant. This information is reviewed by AWA and when the program is satisfied that the slaughter facilities and conditions comply with AWA requirements, the plant will be sent a letter confirming compliance and the farm(s) that wished to use the plant will be informed.

Post-Audit: *Follow-Up & Corrective Action*

- **Determination.** Once the results of both the farm and the slaughter inspections have been obtained, AWA will make one of three written certification determinations:
 - 1) Your operation is approved as meeting 100% of AWA standards and policies;
 - 2) Your operation has correctable non-conformances;
 - 3) Your operation is denied certification because the auditor was denied entry to areas of the operation or there are significant animal welfare concerns.
- **Corrective Action Plan.** If AWA deems that you have correctable nonconformances, it will provide you with a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) form identifying and describing them. You must complete and return the CAP within one month, describing the steps you have taken or will take to correct the non-compliances and a schedule for doing so. The AWA Approvals Board will not grant certification until all compliance concerns identified on the CAP have acceptable corrective actions.
- **Program Assistance.** AWA has employees who will work with you to develop your CAP and make necessary changes.
- **Denial.** If your farm is denied certification, you must wait six months before reapplying. If your farm is denied certification due to an administrative termination, such as losing an approved slaughter facility, you may reapply at any time. If a violation is severe, AWA may refuse reapplication to the program entirely.



Additional Audit Information

For additional information on the AWA audit process, review **AWA Policy Manual** Parts 2 and 3 and the following Annexes:

Corrective Action Plan Flow Chart	Annex 9
Conflict of Interest Policy	Annex 1, Part A
Register of Staff and Board Members Interests	Annex 1, Part B
AWA Management Review Procedure	Annex 20

AWA LABEL USE GUIDELINES



Label Approval. When a farm is certified by AWA, it may begin using the appropriate AWA label or seal on its products.

- If animals have been raised on AWA farms and slaughtered at AWA recommended plants, their meat and hides may carry the AWA label.
- If dairy animals are raised on AWA farms, their milk may carry the AWA label.
- Fiber from animals on AWA farms may carry the AWA label.

Label Requirements. As a general matter, the AWA label must be reproduced from original artwork directly obtained from AWA. The label’s use must also be:

- Complete and upright
- In proportion to the product description
- Clearly visible
- Legible over the whole of a background
- On the main face of the label or packaging

USDA-FSIS Label Approval. As described in the **USDA-FSIS section**, prior to using the AWA label, approval by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety & Inspection Service (FSIS) is required.

Additional Label Use Information

For more information about the use of AWA’s label and seal, review **AWA Policy Manual** Chapter 4 and the following Annexes:

General label use	Annex 25
For those not directly accredited by AWA	Annex 13
For slaughter facilities approved by AWA	Annex 14
For multi-ingredient products	Annex 25
For agricultural products and equipment	Annex 27
Dual production and sale of product	Annex 26

AWA MARKETING SUPPORT

AWA provides free marketing support to AWA-certified farmers. According to AWA, its Marketing, Public Relations and Outreach teams have the capacity to assist you by:

Marketing Your Products

- Writing and distributing press releases about your farm
- Featuring news about your farm on AWA's website, blog, print newsletter and press releases
- Listing your farm and retailers offering your products on AWA's online searchable database

Facilitating Networking and Events

- Helping you develop relationships with retailers, restaurants, and farmers markets
- Hosting events to promote your products
- Attending conferences or workshops with you to help improve your and the program's visibility

Providing Marketing Materials

- Providing you a kit of promotional materials, including brochures, signs, pens, magnets, note pads, and sticky notes
- Providing you free signage (both metal gate signs and farmers market banners)

Offering Marketing Advice

- Advising you regarding online marketing, social media (**AWA Guide to Using Social Media**), and more traditional forms of marketing
- **Assisting you with label design** and USDA-FSIS approval, including:
 - **Meat Labeling 101 Guide**
 - **Label Gallery of Current AWA Products**
 - **AWA Egg Carton Order Form**
- Advising you on using photos for marketing purposes (**Taking Pictures of Your Farm**)

For more on AWA marketing support, visit the **AWA Marketing Support Webpage**.

AWA COSTS

AWA is free. There are no certification or audit fees. However, there may be costs associated with transitioning a farm to meet AWA standards in preparation for an application for certification.

KINDERHOOK FARM

Ghent, New York



Animals grazing on Kinderhook Farm.

Operation Profile:

- 400-500 Black Angus and Red Devon cattle
- 400 Dorper sheep
- 450 laying hens
- 500 broiler chickens
- 4 heritage breed pigs & 30 piglets

Certification: Animal Welfare Approved (beef cattle, sheep, laying hens)

Background

Kinderhook Farm is situated on over 1200 acres in Ghent, New York, that were previously used for a conventional dairy operation. Along with business partners Steve and Renee Clearman, who bought the land, farmers Lee and Georgia Ranney have transformed the property into a grazing farm. Today, the Ranneys raise Black Angus and Red Devon cattle, Dorper sheep, laying hens, broiler chickens and heritage breed pigs. Kinderhook Farm's products are sold at its farm stand and to restaurants and smaller retail markets throughout New York.

According to Georgia, Kinderhook Farm employs an intensive rotational grazing system, providing their cattle and sheep with a 100% grass and legume diet. She says they grow and harvest hay on their farm to feed the cattle and sheep during the winter, and use Maremma and Akbash livestock guardian dogs to protect their animals from predators – namely a significant coyote population.

Getting Certified

Kinderhook Farm is certified by Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) for its beef cattle, sheep flock, and laying hens. Kinderhook Farm first sought AWA-certification in order to maintain an existing, valuable business relationship. It was selling beef cattle to Grazin' Angus Acres (GAA), a farm in Ghent owned by Dan and Susan Gibson, when GAA sought and received AWA certification. By AWA standards, GAA was then required to purchase only AWA-certified animals. Kinderhook Farm obtained AWA certification for their cattle and have since pursued and received certification for most of its other species. (Kinderhook Farm is currently seeking certification for its broiler chickens. Georgia says the farm has not been able to certify its pigs because it has not found an AWA-certified seller of piglets, but hopes to overcome that constraint in the future.)

According to the Ranneys, by the time the farm sought AWA certification, it was already largely compliant with AWA requirements. To achieve certification the Ranneys only had to make “minor tweaks,” like removing certain ingredients from their feed for broiler chickens. (Georgia reports that AWA's Corrective Action Plans have always been manageable.) Like other AWA members, the Ranneys do not have to pay any fees for their certification. The Ranneys do, however, pay for their cattle and sheep to be Certified Grassfed.



“We feel that it’s important to be part of a program that provides third-party auditing, and shows our customers that we are dedicated to the highest possible welfare standards.”

A closer look at the cattle on Kinderhook Farm.

AWA Certification Outcomes

Enhanced marketing & branding. The Ranneys use the AWA label as an independent validation of their practices. They use the label on the farm’s website, newsletter, egg cartons, brochures, and farm store signs.

Marketing Support. According to Georgia, AWA also provides tremendous marketing support to increase the reach of AWA products. This support includes providing member farms with AWA labels and brochures, and listing all members on the AWA website.

Better Record-Keeping & Farm Awareness. Georgia believes that keeping records for AWA certification will add value to any farmer's business. First, the business will be better organized. Second, strong record-keeping practices serve as a valuable avenue for tracking and understanding the status of animal stocks.

Support Meeting Welfare Standards. The Ranneys have found the AWA audits to be very rigorous. However, Georgia notes that in her experience, "AWA wants to help you achieve or maintain certification. I believe that their inspectors have deep understanding of how animals should be raised, including recent developments in animal husbandry." As a result, AWA has been willing to assist in developing a plan for needed changes. In that regard, she has found AWA "extremely easy" to work with.

Why Certify with AWA?

Georgia believes AWA certification is one way of giving consumers confidence that they are supporting a farm whose livestock is being raised according to AWA's high animal welfare standards. Georgia also notes the importance of transparency: "Especially in light of recent videos of animals being subjected to abuse by workers in factory conditions, we feel that it is important to be a part of a program that provides third-party auditing, and shows our consumers that we are dedicated to the highest possible welfare standards."



An example of Kinderhook's welfare-certified product.

STARK HALLOW FARM

Danville, Vermont

PHOTO CREDIT: URBAN EXODUS63



Laura Smith and Vanessa Riva of Stark Hollow Farm.

Operation Profile:

- 130 Icelandic Sheep
- 2 American Milking Devon Cows
- 2 Tamworth breeding sows & 5 Tamworth piglets
- 25 Heritage breed laying hens

Certification: Animal Welfare Approved (sheep, dairy cows, pigs)

Background

In 2014, Laura Smith and Vanessa Riva bought a 78-acre farmstead in Danville, Vermont, now Stark Hollow Farm. Today, Stark Hollow Farm raises 130 registered pure-bred Icelandic sheep, 2 American Milking Devon cows, a small herd of Tamworth pigs and piglets and a flock of heritage breed laying hens. Laura and Vanessa sell meat products, eggs, Icelandic pelts, fiber products, and farm equipment through their farm stand; their CSA; at the Burlington, VT, farmers market; through occasional online farm stands; and wholesale, through Green Pasture Meats.

According to Laura, in the warm season, Stark Hollow rotationally grazes its cattle and sheep on pasture. The farm's Tamworth pigs are raised outdoors in woodland lots and on pasture. Laura and Vanessa state that they constructed a barn to meet specific AWA standards, which the animals have access to during winter months.

Getting Certified

In 2016, Laura and Vanessa came across the AWA certification program website. After contacting AWA they felt that the program was a great match, as it seemed to offer very high animal welfare standards, good customer service, technical support and affordability.

According to Laura, she and Vanessa decided to pursue certification (1) to help them run a more sustainable and humane operation; (2) to provide their customers with assurance that their animals were being raised in accordance with a formal set of standards; and (3) to set themselves apart in the industry.

Laura and Vanessa have had to spend money to scale-up their buildings to meet AWA standards. Laura notes: “AWA size requirements for structures and loafing areas is generous, so any increases in flock size, even by an animal or two, must be considered and accommodated.” However, like other AWA members, Laura and Vanessa do not have to pay any fees for the standard AWA certification. (They pay a \$100 fee for the “Grassfed” certification.)

AWA Certification Outcomes

Benefits to Animals. In order to become certified, Laura and Vanessa had to make some changes to their farming practices, such as being more conscious about the exact timing of their piglet castration, and not having their ewes lamb before 13 months. However, after reviewing the materials provided by AWA, they believe these changes are beneficial.

“Certification demonstrates the commitment of a farmer to the welfare of their animals and gives consumers the assurance that the products they are purchasing come from animals allowed to live a life truer to their nature.”



PHOTO CREDIT: URBAN EXODUS63

An Icelandic Sheep on Stark Hollow Farm.

Marketing & Consumer Interest. Stark Hollow Farm uses the AWA label on its products and on its website and promotional materials. Although Laura and Vanessa are relatively new AWA members, they believe it has already made an impact on their customers, who seem concerned about animal welfare and appreciate the validation the certification provides. They highlight that, since becoming certified, they receive more questions from their customers about the certification and their practices, which has provided them with more opportunity to educate consumers and “set themselves apart.” They state that their customers generally would rather pay a bit more for products when they know the animals are certified as meeting AWA’s standards. Though Laura and Vanessa have not yet taken advantage of AWA marketing support, they plan to do so.

Being Better Prepared. According to Laura, the required health and emergency plans have made them better prepared farmers. Specifically, they now have plans in place in case of disasters such as fire, disease or even the breakdown of slaughter transportation. Laura also notes that preparing for certification audits has made them more organized, generally.

Support Meeting Welfare Standards. Laura and Vanessa have found AWA audits to be “very rigorous.” They believe the auditors “really know farming” and can offer helpful technical support as to how to achieve program standards. They also feel that the AWA program supports efforts to achieve certification, working with farmers to figure out how to make farms compliant. When they have had minor non-conformances with program standards, they have found the Corrective Action Plan process to be “very manageable.”

Why Certify with AWA?

Vanessa has this advice for farms considering pursuing AWA certification:

“Certification demonstrates the commitment of a farmer to the welfare of their animals and gives consumers the assurance that the products they are purchasing come from animals allowed to live a life truer to their nature.”



Herding the sheep on Stark Hollow Farm.