

Label Rouge: Pasture-Based Poultry Production in France

Livestock Technical Note

Abstract: Pasture-raised poultry is increasingly popular in the U.S. American farmers and small companies can benefit from studying the French Label Rouge program. Started as a grassroots movement and now commanding 30% of the French poultry market, it has helped boost incomes for small farmers.

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Introduction

Pasture-raised poultry is the leading product in a program in France called *Label Rouge*. This program provides premium products to consumers, increases farmer income, and strengthens rural development. It consists of many regional producer-oriented alliances, called *filieres*, which produce and market their own branded products under a common label. A third-party certification program ensures that strict standards are being followed. Other countries are beginning to take note of the *Label Rouge* program.



The Label Rouge program focuses on superior quality and gourmet taste.



Access to range is an essential part of Label Rouge production.

In the U.S., a grassroots “pastured poultry” movement has been growing since the early 1990s. Poultry raised on pasture are processed on-farm and direct marketed, creating supplemental income on small diversified family farms. See ATTRA’s *Sustainable Poultry: Production Overview* for a description. The French *Label Rouge*, which also started out as a grassroots program, provides an example of what is possible when farmers, consumers, and organizations work together.

The following discussion of *Label Rouge* is divided into two sections:

- Part I: Production
- Part II: Organization

Related publications available from ATTRA

[Sustainable Poultry: Production Overview](#)

[Range Poultry Housing](#)

[Organic Livestock Feed Suppliers](#)

[Legal Issues for Small-Scale Poultry Processors](#) (a Heifer International publication)

[Profitable Poultry: Raising Birds on Pasture](#) (a Sustainable Agriculture Network publication)

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Part I: Production

Label Rouge began 40 years ago as a grassroots movement led by visionary farmers. As poultry became more industrialized after World War II, demand grew in France for the taste of traditionally raised farm chickens. *Label Rouge* performance has been “stunning” and now accounts for 30% of poultry sales to the public, in spite of its high price—twice the price of conventional poultry (1).

The *Label Rouge* program focuses on high-quality products, mainly meat, with poultry as the flagship product. It emphasizes quality attributes such as taste and food safety, and free-range production practices. The average consumer can note a positive difference in taste between *Label Rouge* poultry and conventional poultry—in fact, regular taste-testing is a certification requirement to prove that these products are “vividly distinguishable” from conventional poultry.

The main reason for the superior taste is considered to be the use of slow-growing birds instead of the fast-growing birds used in the conventional industry. The slow-growing birds are from specialty “rustic” genetic stock and are harvested close to sexual maturity. The meat is flavorful and firm, but not tough.

STANDARDS

Strict and comprehensive standards ensure quality. Below are the standards related to broiler production.

Table 1: Label Rouge Standards for Broiler Production

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Genetics | Only certain genetics are allowed—slow-growing breeds suited for outdoor production. |
| Buildings | Buildings are a maximum of 4304 sq. ft. No farm can have more than 4 buildings. Buildings must be at least 98 ft. from each other. |
| Maximum density in building | The maximum stocking density is 0.98 sq. ft. per bird. No more than 4400 birds are permitted in each building. Chickens require 2.2 lbs. of litter each. |
| Access and size of range | All birds have access to the outdoors from 9 a.m. until dusk after 6 weeks of age, and must be outside for at least 42 days of grow-out. Range requirements are 22 sq. ft. per bird. About 2 acres of land are needed per house. 1.2 ft. of pophole exits are required per 100 sq. ft. of building. |
| Feed | Feed rations must consist of at least 75% cereal and must be nonmedicated; starter rations can be 50% cereal because of a higher soybean content. Rations cannot contain animal products, growth stimulants, or other additives. Fishmeal is not permitted. Synthetic amino acids are allowed. |
| Other | Although routine medications are not allowed, antibiotics prescribed by a veterinarian are. Coccidiostats are permitted but must be withdrawn 5 days before slaughter. Vaccination is allowed. Beak and toe trimming are not. |
| Slaughter age | Birds must be grown a minimum of 81 days. |
| Min. dress weight | 2.2 lbs without giblets, minimum. |
| Sanitation period | There is a minimum sanitation period of 21 days between flocks. |
| Transport | No more than 2 hours traveling time or 64 miles to processing plant. |
| Processing | Airchill. |
| Shelf life | Sold fresh within 9 days after slaughter. |

Chart adapted from Francois Paybou, 2000. Technical and Economic Feasibility Study of Adopting French *Label Rouge* Poultry Systems to Illinois. Master's Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2).

Independent third-party certifying organizations ensure that standards are being followed. Inspection occurs once per flock, twice per year for feedmills, monthly for processing plants, and twice per year for hatcheries. Each visit includes bacteriology tests and process control inspections. There are five taste tests per year.

The standards are a baseline that many *Label Rouge filieres* surpass. For example, some groups:

- Use dividers in the house to divide flocks into smaller flocks
- Require tree and bush plantings to integrate the house into the countryside as well as provide shade on pasture
- Use smaller, portable houses
- Do not permit pesticide use on the range
- Require grit and whole grains to improve gut health
- Maintain a constant ration to keep the taste of the birds constant, not changing it when other ingredients are less expensive

Besides broilers, standards also exist for layers, turkeys, ducks, geese, guineafowl, and capons. Layers require double yards (rested in rotation) since they are on the range longer than broilers. The standards are available (in French) at <<http://www.agriculture.gouv.fr/alim/sign/labe/00noti-techLR.html>>. There are also *Label Rouge* ham, sausage, eggs, rabbit, and cheese products.

As is evident from this discussion of standards, a certification program can permit much broader production claims than a mere definition can. In addition, production claims can be verified by the consumer.

CASE STUDIES: LANDES FILIERE AND LOUE FILIERE

The journey from a grassroots movement to an industry can be seen by studying two different *filieres*.

The *Label Rouge* movement began in the '60s in the Southwest of France, in the forested Landes

region. Landes poultry are still known for being raised in a pine forest, using small portable housing called "Marensines."

The size of the buildings ranges from 16' x 16' (270 sq. ft.) to 20' x 33' (645 sq. ft.). Older houses were built of wood; new ones are metal. In a dense forest, the smaller houses are used to fit between the trees. Litter is spread in the houses, which are floorless. Brooding is done in the houses with portable gas brooders. Part of the feed is kept outside to help train birds to go out.



The Landes filiere uses portable housing.

The houses are moved after every grow-out (three times per year) and have knobs where wheels can be attached and towed by tractor. The houses are sometimes placed beside cornfields so that birds can benefit from shade and forage for insects. Often, only three sites on the farm are used in rotation.

The sites have a water line or producers fill barrels, which feed water troughs, every couple of days.

You can read about the Landes *filiera* on their website <<http://www.fermiers-landais.fr>>. (There is an English-language option.)



The Landes birds roam in a pine forest.

George Berbille invented the portable “Marensine” system 40 years ago and is considered the father of range poultry production in France. His farm is in the Southwest in the Landes *filiere*. He is now elderly and has lost a leg to a combine but still raises corn and poultry (50,000 birds per year by himself). He has 20 small houses, which take two days to move with the help of three people. (They are dismantled before moving.) He also has an on-farm feedmill and mixes feed daily for his use and for sale.

Although *Label Rouge* production began in the Landes region, it was the Loue *filiere* that was instrumental in making it a viable industry. *Label Rouge* did not grow as an industry until the product became widely available at supermarkets.



Stationary houses and yards are common in *Label Rouge* production. This is a Loue farm.

Loue is now the largest *filiere* and represents the typical production system used—a small fixed house and yard. The house has automated feeding and watering equipment, and chicks are brooded in it. The house has several popholes that allow access to the range. There are shade bushes planted in the yard as well as tree plantings. The yard immediately outside the house is dirt. Since specialty “rustic” genetics are used, the birds forage well beyond the house and have access to grassy pasture. Feed and water are also provided outside. The Loue

website is <<http://www.loue.fr>>. It is available in French only but has many informative pictures.

It is not necessary to use stationary housing in order to build a national industry. U.S. pastured-poultry producers are keenly interested in pasture rotation and use portable houses; in adapting *Label Rouge* features, U.S. producers are more likely to promote portable housing than stationary housing. However, small specialty companies may adapt a stationary system. Production systems are an excellent way to differentiate between companies in the marketplace, as long as the basic standards are followed to market under a common label.

Label Rouge birds are usually produced on diversified farms where they are integrated with other livestock and grain production. Bird rations are supplemented with whole grains from the farm; litter from the house is spread on the fields. Poultry may bring in 50% of the farm income.

Although no fence is used in either the Loue or Landes *filiere*, the loss to predators is only 1% (the U.S., however, has more predator pressure). European Union (EU) definitions differentiate fenced and unfenced production systems:

- Fenced: “raised in open air”
- Unfenced: “raised in total freedom”

The *Label Rouge* program permits both. The European Union specification 1538-91 defines *Label Rouge* as “traditional free-range poultry.”

See ATTRA’s *Sustainable Poultry: Production Overview* for a discussion of other range production systems.

GENETICS

Slow-growing birds are key in *Label Rouge* production—birds grow to 5 lbs. in 12 weeks. In comparison, the fast-growing broilers (Cornish cross) of the conventional industry reach 5 lbs. in 6–7 weeks. Not only does slow growth allow the organs, muscle, and bones to grow in harmony, it also results in a more flavorful meat. The carcass is generally more elongated and has a smaller breast and larger legs than conventional carcasses. In addition, slower-growing breeds are more suited to outdoor production than Cornish cross.

Slow-growing birds are used for good flavor and meat quality.



The Label Rouge carcass (left) is more elongated than the compact conventional carcass (right).

In Europe the slow-growing genetics are mainly supplied by the poultry breeding companies SASSO (3) and Hubbard-ISA (4). They do not sell the actual broiler chicks, but rather the parents; however, many pastured-poultry producers have hatching capability. SASSO's typical *Label Rouge* cross is T44N male x SA51 female (using a different male—the T44NI—results in white underfeathers in the offspring). A typical Hubbard-ISA cross is S77N male x JA57 female. Broilers from both of these crosses will have red feathers, yellow shanks, thin skin, and a naked neck. Other parents are available for broilers with white feathers and skin, black feathers, barred, non-naked neck, etc. or for faster growth.

At the time of this writing, SASSO and Hubbard-ISA genetics of this type are not available in the U.S. However, a U.S. company called Rainbow Breeding Company (5) is developing similar genetics and offers Free Range (FR) Broiler parents. FR Broiler chicks (day-olds) are also available. Male chicks are regularly available; female chicks are available only sometimes since they are used more in breeding; females grow at 85% the rate of the males.



A black SASSO broiler with the "naked neck" characteristic.

Medium-growing genetics are also of interest for U.S. pastured-poultry producers. Producer Tim Shell (6) is developing a broiler called CornDel which is a Delaware/Cornish cross combination. Grow-out is 9 weeks. According to Shell, the chicks can be used for parents if feed is restricted so they will not get too fat. Availability is limited. Henry Noll (7) offers a Silver Cross that grows to 5 lbs. in 9 weeks. Joe Cebe, Sr. (8) offers a Cebe Red and Cebe Black meat variety that grows to 5 lbs. in 9–10 weeks.

Redbro is a Hubbard-ISA Shaver product that happens to be available currently in the U.S. via a Canadian company that imports parents from France. It grows out in 9–10 weeks. Jerry Srednicki (9) at a Connecticut hatchery ships day-old chicks.

There is interest in using standard heirloom chicken breeds for gourmet poultry production, but in general, heirloom breeds have not yet been selected for commercial production and the carcass will be very small at 12 weeks.

Turkeys are native to the Americas and there are several slow-growing breeds available. These are naturally-mating turkeys and do not require artificial insemination. Some have geographical ties to the regions in which they were developed (e.g., the Bourbon Red is from Kentucky and the Narragansett is from Massachusetts). Mike Walters Hatchery (10) offers eight heirloom turkey breeds, some of which have been selected for commercial production.

Developing more poultry breeds with geographical ties could be an opportunity for small U.S. poultry breeders.

HEALTH

The use of slow-growing genetics and the low-density *Label Rouge* production system offer distinct health advantages—ascites, leg problems, and sudden death are minimal, and birds have good immunity. Mortality of conventional broilers in France is 6% during a 6-week grow-out; it

is half that for *Label Rouge* production (3%) even during a much longer grow-out (12 weeks) (11).

Since *Label Rouge* birds have a longer life, they have a different vaccination schedule than conventional broilers. For example, in France, conventional broilers are not vaccinated for Marek's Disease; *Label Rouge* broilers are vaccinated. *Label Rouge* birds are generally vaccinated for coccidiosis and given dewormers in the feed. Probiotics are used; antibiotics can be used only if prescribed by a veterinarian. Regular biosecurity on the farm is important—footbaths are used at the entryways to houses, and visitors must wear protective clothing.

Since France has a mild climate, birds are raised outdoors year-round. However, the mean number of flocks per year is only 3.2 since the grow-out is long and there is a long downtime required between flocks for proper sanitation and pasture rest.

FEEDING

A low-protein and low-calorie diet is used for slow-growing birds. Whereas typical fast-growing Cornish cross rations in the industry start at 22% crude protein and finish at 17% protein, *Label Rouge* rations start at only 20% protein and finish at 15%. According to Jeff Mattocks of Fertrell (12), pastured poultry producers in the U.S. often use only one ration of 19% protein. A low-protein ration is used to slow down the rapid growth of Cornish Cross. This type of ration could easily be used for slow-growing genetics.

Low-protein and low-calorie diets are used for a slow rate of gain.

All meat meal is banned from livestock feed in Europe. Even fishmeal is not permitted in *Label Rouge* production because it could be confused with meat meal. Only vegetable fat is permitted and no genetically engineered crops can be used in feed.

Some feedmills in France are dedicated to the eradication of Salmonella in feed. At Landal, a feedmill in the Southwest that supplies feed to the Landes company, entering trucks must be disinfected, and high heat is used during milling to kill pathogens.

PROCESSING

Some processing plants exclusively process *Label Rouge* products; for others, *Label Rouge* is only a percentage of their work. There are several large automated *Label Rouge* plants (for example, *Fermier Landes* processes 200,000 birds per week), as well as small ones. There

are many quality-control points during *Label Rouge* processing to ensure a high-quality carcass. Processing plants in France cool carcasses by air-chilling instead of immersion-chilling. (In immersion-chilling, the carcasses soak up water.)



Air-chilling is used instead of immersion-chilling in France.

A soft scald is used instead of the hard scald typical in the U.S. (A soft scald uses a lower temperature for a longer time than a hard scald and keeps the skin intact.)

Although ready-to-cook products are the most common, a variety of dressing methods are used. In the *effilee* style, the bird is eviscerated but the crop, head, and feet are left intact. Corn finishing is a part of this presentation—the customer should be able to feel whole grains still in the crop. Birds dressed in this style are slaughtered and eviscerated manually.

Processing plants may also handle a variety of species. For example, *Fermier Landes* processes chickens, guinea fowl, cockerels, and rabbits, as well as capons and turkeys for Christmas. Although it is a large plant, they can put together small custom orders for butchers and other clients.



Butchershops sell specialized products, including this *Label Rouge* poultry with the feet still on.

Part II: Organization

Coordination of the supply chain offers a number of benefits, including coordination of the stages of production, lower costs, ability to reduce pathogens throughout, and complete traceability.

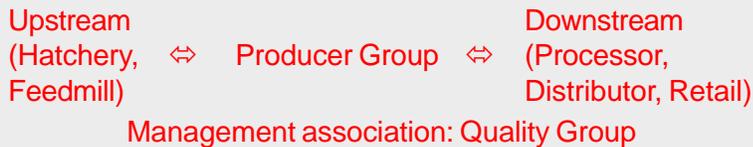
The key to the *Label Rouge* system is the supply chain. Grassroots pastured-poultry producers in the U.S. are largely independent and may be particularly interested in supply chain structure and

the benefits that coordination can offer.

SUPPLY CHAIN STRUCTURE

Filiere is a French term for a supply chain that centers around a group of poultry producers with upstream affiliates (breeding company, hatchery, feed mill) and downstream affiliates (processor, distributor, retailer). It is a highly coordinated alliance, but not necessarily vertically integrated. While some *filiere*s do own the hatchery, the feed mill, and/or the processing facilities, they differ from conventional integrators.

Diagram 1. *Filiere*s



The *filiere* is centered around a group of producers and associates called the “quality group,” which holds managerial responsibility for the *filiere*. This body—not the processor, input supplier, or distributor—retains control of the brand and makes the pricing, marketing, and advertising decisions. This allows for a balance of power among producers and other players in the supply chain. Farmers earn more per bird from *Label Rouge* production than they do from being contract growers in the conventional poultry industry; however, conventional contract growers raise more birds per year. Since farmers are represented in the quality group, they have input into the returns they get on their birds and the number of flocks they raise.

Deciding on the margin that goes to the farmer is a crucial point for each supply chain. The *filiere*’s

quality group reviews the market prices—for both the production inputs and the final products—frequently, and adjusts the farmers’ margin and the price to the consumer as needed. Risks and rewards are shared by all players in the chain.

Each sector incurs costs from being part of the supply chain, including costs associated with certification, such as time required to keep records. Each sector may also have to contribute to a check-off that funds the group’s marketing and other activities. Thus each sector must have some incentive to participate, and the rewards must outweigh the costs.

There is no one model for *filiere* structure, and there is a lot of crossing-over within and among the *filiere*s in the *Label Rouge* system. For example, a processing plant may serve more than one producer group; a breeding company may sell breeding stock to all the *filiere*s.

BENEFITS OF COORDINATION

A coordinated supply chain helps lower production costs by improving cost efficiencies (bulk purchases, etc.) and coordinating the stages of production. It also allows complete traceability of the final product. The *Label Rouge* traceback system is so detailed that batches of birds can be traced from the consumer to their grandparents’ flocks. A code on the package indicates the farm, the origin of the chicks, the processing plant, and so on. Wing-banded birds can even be traced individually.

Coordination permits quality control throughout the supply chain. If there are broken wings in the picker, where did they come from—the picker or the farm? It helps cooperating growers produce a consistent product.



On-farm record-keeping is important not only for charting performance but also for traceability.

A coordinated supply chain also provides an excellent opportunity for addressing food safety. In *Label Rouge* production, a pathogen-reduction or HACCP-type program is applied not only at the processing level (as required in the U.S.) but throughout the entire supply chain. For example, breeding flocks, hatcheries, feed mills, farms, processing plants, and transportation are all monitored for Salmonella and other pathogens. *Label Rouge* has an excellent food safety record—only 3% of *Label Rouge* carcasses are contaminated with Salmonella (1). Sales of *Label Rouge* products have risen in the wake of several BSE or “mad cow” food scares, since consumers are assured that no animal by-products have been fed in the program.

Another benefit of coordination is that *Label Rouge* provides technical support and troubleshooting assistance to producers, which is particularly helpful for health issues such as a vaccination program and disease diagnosis.

There is not a lot of public research on *Label Rouge* production. Companies do research on their own farms or the farms of their producers, but they do not share the resulting information.

MARKETING

The *Label Rouge filieres* sell branded products that are strongly tied to regional areas and have their own images. For example, the Landes *filie* markets the image of chickens ranging free in the pine forests along the Atlantic coast. There may be several regional brands competing in a supermarket.



The Landes *filie* markets poultry raised in pine forests along the Atlantic coast.

In France, there is a concept of “terroir”—that taste comes from the earth. Certain regions are associated with certain tastes. In fact, most

of the *Label Rouge* brands are names of French cities or regions. Geographic restriction is important to prevent large-scale copying, and brand ownership keeps the brand names in the farmers’ hands.

Most *Label Rouge* products are sold whole but the amount of cut-up is increasing. About 135 million birds are produced each year, and 15 million are cut-up. *Label Rouge* also offers an organic product.



Label Rouge chicken is sold both whole and cut-up in the supermarket.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

The *Label Rouge* system has strong organizational support both in the government and in the private sector. The French government is committed to strengthening rural development. Government agencies are responsible for setting and maintaining certification standards (CNLC), accrediting the certifiers (COFRAC), and protecting against label infringement (CERQUA). CERQUA protects *Label Rouge* from being copied by store brands or private labels.

To obtain a label, a *filiere* submits a *cahier de charge* to the CNLC. This is a very detailed business plan, or code of practice, that documents the production, processing, and monitoring process. It can take several months to get approval.

SYNALAF is an industry organization that collects a check-off from the sale of each bird to conduct national consumer-education campaigns about the benefits of *Label Rouge* poultry. SYNALAF represents 38 *filières*, which include 6,000 farmers—about half the poultry growers in France. Public education is key to the high premiums paid for *Label Rouge* products (1).

Strong consumer organizations are involved in the development of standards and certification. This results in standards that are responsive to consumer interests, such as a recent ban on the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

The *Label Rouge* system is complex but has built good working relationships — among producers, consumers, and government — that position family farmers to be economically sustainable. *Label Rouge* is farmer-created, consumer-driven, and government-supported (2).

Interest in labeling is growing in the U.S., where Certified Organic is currently one of the best-known labels. “Quality labels” like *Label Rouge* provide information to consumers on product attributes such as taste, health benefits, and nutrition, as well as on social issues such as support of local farms. They can also provide information on ecologically sound production practices and other factors related to sustainability. Please call ATTRA for further information on “eco-labeling” and organic certification.



A *Label Rouge* product in the supermarket.

***Label Rouge* Work in the U.S.**

The University of Illinois has a project to promote the production and marketing of gourmet chickens in Illinois (13). In 1999, graduate student Francois Paybou, working under the direction of agricultural economics professor Randall Westgren, carried out technical and economic feasibility studies for adopting the *Label Rouge* system in Illinois (2). Although Paybou determined feasibility to be positive, he identified two key elements that are lacking in the U.S.: an economical supply of French genetics, and air-chill processing plants. Another student, Amy Heady, did a market feasibility study to analyze consumer demand. She found that adoption of a *Label Rouge* system was still premature and too expensive given the current retail market. Feasibility may be greater in the restaurant market, where Chicago chefs, at least, are willing to pay \$1.50 to \$2.00 per lb. (14).

Entrepreneur David Wilson started a *Label Rouge*-type business venture in the early '90s. He became interested in *Label Rouge* by talking to chefs who wanted a premium bird. He imported specialty genetics from France, calling them “La Belle Rouge,” and contracted with growers in Kentucky and North Carolina who had older chicken houses on their farms. He followed *Label Rouge* requirements for flock size and density; the total range space was usually a couple of acres around the house. The broiler operation was year-round, but the birds did not go outdoors when the temperature dropped below 40°F, making a 90-day window in Kentucky in which the birds stayed indoors. During this time, stocking density was reduced and alfalfa was added to the feed. Grow-out was 12 weeks. Birds were shipped to an air-chill processing plant in Kentucky (no longer in operation). The meat was sold in Kentucky and North Carolina. According to Paybou, the Wilson business failed because investors rather than a farmer group were in control. They did not fully understand the system—the failure was not due to problems with the product or market.

More recently, the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) was funded by the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service’s Scientific Cooperative Research Program to travel to France to gather technical information about poultry produced under *Label Rouge*, to disseminate the in-

formation, to develop French contacts, and facilitate drafting of production standards. NCAT operates ATTRA, an information service for sustainable agriculture that reaches thousands of farmers, educators, and other agricultural professionals each year.

OTHER FRENCH LABELING PROGRAMS

Label Rouge is only one of four major labeling programs in France. The other programs include *Appellation D'Origine Controlee* (AOC), Organic, and Certificate of Conformity. All four complement each other well.

The major labeling programs in France complement each other, reducing consumer confusion.

The *Appellation D'Origine Controlee* (AOC) label is probably the best-known. This program reserves brand names for a certain region—for example, “champagne” refers to

sparkling wines produced in the Champagne region of France. The product cannot legally be reproduced outside its region. Such labels are most often used for wine and cheese products, but there is a poultry product called “poulet de Bresse” that can be raised only in the Bresse region. These birds are known for being finished on milk. Please see the website <<http://www.pouletbresse.com/>> for more information.

The European Union actually recognizes two types of geographic protection of agricultural products: Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographic Indication (PGI). The PDO refers to the AOC label. PGI is less strict and refers to the *Label Rouge* system. The following website from the European Union discusses quality labels: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/foodqual/quali1_en.htm>.

The French Organic standards for poultry production are based on the European Union requirements but are stricter. Grow-out is a long 99 days. The Organic market in France is not as well-developed as in the U.S. because of competition from *Label Rouge*. Organic poultry products cost four times as much as conventional products, whereas *Label Rouge* products cost only twice as much. ATTRA can provide more information on organic poultry production.

The Certificate of Conformity program is a quality-control label that is relatively industry-

friendly. Medium-growth genetics are used. A fast-growing male is crossed with a slow-growing *Label Rouge* female to obtain a 5-pound bird in 56 days. Natural feeding is required, but access to the outdoors is not. This program certifies the process used but does not have taste tests.

OPPORTUNITIES

Label Rouge-type poultry production is an opportunity well-suited to the grassroots pastured-poultry movement in the U.S., as well as small specialty poultry companies. However, raising slow-growing broilers to 12 weeks costs more than raising fast-growing broilers to 8 weeks. Many grassroots pastured-poultry producers market directly to consumers on the farm or at farmers' markets, and their customers may not be willing to pay the higher price.

Small poultry companies or networks that serve larger markets or specialty markets may more readily find customers who are willing to pay extra for a pasture-raised, gourmet-type bird. Coordinated networks could keep the products at an affordable price by means of fine-tuned production systems and cost efficiencies. In France, consumers at all economic levels buy specialty poultry; not just wealthy consumers. The future development of a certification program will be important for consumer education, which will in turn help build demand.

Large companies may find a certification program similar to the “Certificate of Conformity” (see section on Other French Labeling Programs) to be a more attractive opportunity than *Label Rouge*. In *Label Rouge*-type production, the flock size is limited to about 16,000 birds on one farm (in four small houses), and there are fewer flocks per year because of the long grow-out period. *Label Rouge* is designed for regional rather than national markets.

The outdoor production systems used in *Label Rouge* are more adapted to small diversified family farms than to large companies. Allan Nation, editor of *The Stockman Grass Farmer* and a U.S. visionary in the field of sustainable agriculture, found during his European travels that it can be a marketing advantage to family farmers to produce something that is “hard to produce” (15).

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- 3) SASSO
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- 5) Rainbow Breeding Company
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FR Broiler parents sell for \$8.00 each. The offspring are \$0.25-\$1.00 each, depending on the number ordered.
- 6) Tim Shell
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The CornDel chicks sell for \$0.95/ea., straight run, plus shipping, in lots of 100 and are shipped on Tuesdays via Priority Mail for arrival on Thurs.
- 7) Noll's Poultry Farm
Kleinfeltersville, PA 17039
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- 8) Cebe Farms
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760-789-8221.
Joe Cebe, Sr.

Straight-run chicks cost \$0.55 each.
- 9) Yankee Chicks, Inc./Hall Brothers Hatchery
P.O. Box 1026
Norwich, CT 06360
860-886-2421
860-889-6351 fax
860-608-1389 cell
Contact: Jerry Srednicki

Straight-run chicks cost \$0.65 each. Males more commonly available.



- 10) Mike Walters
Walters Hatchery
Rt. 3, Box 1490
Stilwell, OK 74960
918-778-3535
turkeylink@intellex.com
<http://www.historicalturkeys.com>
- 11) Jean-Michel Faure, 2002. INRA, Nouzilly, France, personal communication.
- 12) Jeff Mattocks
Fertrell Co.
P.O. Box 265
Bainbridge, PA 17502
717-367-1566
800-347-1566
jeff@fertrell.com
- 13) Illinois Gourmet Chicken Project
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
326 Mumford Hall
1301 West Gregory Dr.
Urbana, IL 61801
Contacts: Randall Westgren,
r-westg@uiuc.edu, 217-333-3686

Deborah Cavanaugh-Grant,
Cvngghrn@uiuc.edu, 217-968-5512
<http://web.aces.uiuc.edu/labelrouge/index.html>

- 14) Heady, Amy. 1999. Market Feasibility for *Label Rouge*-Type Poultry in Illinois. Master's Thesis. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- 15) Nation, Allan. 2001. Forget wine, the French say the money is in specialty cheese. *The Stockman Grass Farmer*. June. p. 1, 6-10.

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