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**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS and  
FRIENDS OF THE EARTH,  
on behalf of the general public,

Plaintiffs,

v.

SANDERSON FARMS, INC.

Defendant.

CASE NO.:

**COMPLAINT FOR UNFAIR  
COMPETITION AND FALSE  
ADVERTISING**

Plaintiffs In Defense of Animals (IDA) and Friends of the Earth (FoE), by their attorneys, allege the following upon information and belief, except for those allegations pertaining to Plaintiffs, which are based on personal knowledge:

**NATURE OF THE ACTION**

1  
2           1.       This case is brought on behalf of Plaintiffs and the general public regarding  
3 Sanderson's farming practices and advertising of its Chicken Products, as listed *infra* ¶ 76 (the  
4 "Products"). Defendant Sanderson Farms, Inc. ("Sanderson") sold these Chicken Products based  
5 on misleading representations in its advertising and misleading representations regarding its  
6 practices.

7           2.       Sanderson's advertising misleads consumers in four ways:

- 8                   a.   Sanderson's advertising misleads consumers into believing that Sanderson's  
9                   chickens were not given antibiotics or other pharmaceuticals;  
10                  b.   Sanderson's advertising misleads consumers into believing that the chickens  
11                   were raised in a natural environment;  
12                  c.   Sanderson's advertising misleads consumers into believing that there is no  
13                   evidence that the use of antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals in poultry  
14                   contributes to the evolution of antibiotic-resistant bacteria; and  
15                  d.   Sanderson's advertising misleads consumers into believing that the Products do  
16                   not contain any antibiotic or pharmaceutical residue.

17           3.       However, the truth is that the feed Sanderson routinely gives to its chickens  
18 contains antibiotics and pharmaceuticals; the chickens are raised indoors in crowded and dirty  
19 industrial sheds, which is one reason why its routine use of antibiotics is necessary; there is  
20 extensive reliable evidence that the use of antibiotics in poultry contributes to antibiotic-resistant  
21 bacteria; and Sanderson's chickens have been found to contain antibiotic and/or pharmaceutical  
22 residue.

23           4.       The ongoing coronavirus global pandemic has highlighted how unsanitary animal  
24 raising and slaughtering practices, like Sanderson's, contribute to calamitous consequences for  
25 public health. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that three out of every four new or  
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27  
28

1 emerging infectious diseases in people come from animals.<sup>1</sup>

2 5. Antibiotic use in poultry, such as Sanderson's routine use for every flock, has  
3 contributed to antibiotic resistance.<sup>2</sup> Resistant bacterial strains in poultry spread to humans, which  
4 causes a risk to human health, specifically to poultry workers.<sup>3</sup> Poultry workers labor in tight  
5 conditions in slaughterhouses, which have become hotspots for coronavirus, including Sanderson  
6 slaughterhouses.<sup>4</sup>

7 6. The prevalence of antibiotic resistant bacteria is relevant in the battle against the  
8 coronavirus pandemic. The Director of the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center at the Milken  
9 Institute for Public Health at George Washington University<sup>5</sup> has stated that antibiotic resistant  
10 bacteria "are going to be what ultimately kills a large portion of COVID-19 victims as they  
11 succumb to secondary bacterial pneumonia."<sup>6</sup>

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14 <sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, available at  
15 [https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-](https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html#:~:text=Scientists%20estimate%20that%20more%20than,States%20and%20around%20the%20world.,)  
16 [diseases.html#:~:text=Scientists%20estimate%20that%20more%20than,States%20and%20around%20the%20world.,](https://www.cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html#:~:text=Scientists%20estimate%20that%20more%20than,States%20and%20around%20the%20world.,) last visited July 2020.

17 <sup>2</sup> Alonso-Hernando, A., Prieto, M., Garcia-Fernandez, C., Alonso-Calleja, C., Capita, R. (2012).  
18 Increase over time in the prevalence of multiple antibiotic resistance among isolates of *Listeria*  
19 *monocytogenes* from poultry in Spain. *Food Control*, 23 (1), 37-41.  
20 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodcont.2011.06.006>, last visited July 2020.

21 <sup>3</sup> Apata, D.F. (2009). Antibiotic Resistance in Poultry. *International Journal of Poultry Science*, 8  
22 (4), 404-408. Agada, G.O.A., Abdullahi, I.O., Aminu, M., Odugbo, M., Chollom, S.C., Kumbish,  
23 P.R., Okwori, A.E.J. (2014). Prevalence and antibiotic resistance profile of Salmonella isolates  
24 from commercial poultry and poultry farm handlers in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. *Microbiology*  
25 *Research Journal International* 4(4), 462-479. <https://doi.org/10.9734/BMRJ/2014/5872>.  
26 Silbergeld, E.K., Graham, J., and Price, L.B. (2008). Industrial food animal production,  
27 antimicrobial resistance, and human health. *The Annual Review of Public Health* 29, 151-169.  
28 [10.1146/annurev.publhealth.29.020907.090904](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.publhealth.29.020907.090904), last visited July 2020.

<sup>4</sup> The Bryan, Texas processing plant had 49 COVID-19 cases, as one example at one Sanderson  
location, reported by the local news, a [https://www.kxxv.com/hometown/brazos-county/49-covid-](https://www.kxxv.com/hometown/brazos-county/49-covid-19-cases-reported-at-sanderson-farms-in-bryan)  
19-cases-reported-at-sanderson-farms-in-bryan, last visited July 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, <http://battlesuperbugs.com/directory/lance-price>, last  
visited July 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Price, Lance B., Ph.D. (2020, April 22). *Superbugs: COVID-19's Coconspirators*. Medium.  
<https://medium.com/gwpublichealth/superbugs-covid-19s-coconspirators-ebc20b9e0b99>, last  
visited July 2020. See also Cox, M. Loman, N., Bogaert, D., O'Grady, J. (2020). Co-infections:  
potentially lethal and unexplored in COVID-19. *The Lancet*, Vol. 1 May 2020.  
[https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanmic/PIIS2666-5247\(20\)30009-4.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanmic/PIIS2666-5247(20)30009-4.pdf).



1 California to render the exercise of jurisdiction by this Court permissible under traditional notions  
2 of fair play and substantial justice.

3 14. Venue is proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(a) because (1) Defendant does substantial  
4 business in this District; and (2) a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to these  
5 claims occurred in this District, and Defendant engaged in the extensive promotion, advertising,  
6 marketing, distribution, and sales of the Products at issue in this District.

7 15. Venue is also proper in this Court under 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e) because Plaintiff In  
8 Defense of Animals resides in the Northern District of California and Plaintiff Friends of the Earth  
9 maintains a presence in the Northern District of California.

10 16. Intradistrict assignment to San Francisco per Local Rule 3-5(b) and 3-2(c) is  
11 appropriate because Plaintiffs are located in or near San Francisco.

## 12 **PARTIES**

### 13 **Plaintiffs**

#### 14 ***In Defense of Animals***

15 17. Plaintiff In Defense of Animals is an international not-for-profit animal protection  
16 organization founded in 1983. IDA's principal place of business is located in San Rafael,  
17 California, where it is incorporated. Its mission is to rescue animals in need, foster respect for all  
18 sentient beings, and spark a revolution of compassion that liberates animals from the tyranny of  
19 systemic cruelty and exploitation. Consistent with this mission, IDA aims to inform the public  
20 about the ways in which animal agriculture impacts animal welfare.

21 18. IDA has more than 250,000 supporters across the globe, with over 450,000  
22 followers on social media.

23 19. As a result of Sanderson's advertising, IDA diverted staff time from its core  
24 mission of ending animal exploitation to addressing Sanderson's advertising and the consumer  
25 confusion that Sanderson caused.

26 20. On December 6, 2016, IDA approached the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in  
27 writing with its concerns about Sanderson's advertising.  
28

21. On approximately December 21, 2016, IDA published an action alert titled “Report Sanderson Farms Deceptive Ads!” It also Tweeted the “Report Sanderson Farms Deceptive Ads!”<sup>7</sup>

22. On December 21, 2016, IDA Tweeted “Sanderson Farms is confusing the public with misdirected ‘facts’ to defend its use of #antibiotics.”<sup>8</sup> That same day, IDA published a similar statement to Facebook, specifically naming Sanderson, and stating that IDA was seeking “to get these ads off air.”<sup>9</sup> More than 300 people engaged with the post and it has been shared more than 70 times.

23. In January 2017, IDA filed a formal complaint with the Better Business Bureau National Advertising Division (NAD). The complaint addressed Sanderson’s advertising on antibiotics, attached examples from Sanderson’s website, social media, and YouTube, and stated, “We believe the claims in these ads to be extremely misleading.” IDA corresponded with the NAD January through April 2017.

24. On February 23, 2017, IDA issued a media release stating that Sanderson “actively misleads customers” and referenced the millions of dollars spent on the advertising campaign that “loudly promoted its practice of pumping chickens with antibiotics as harmless, and smeared Chicken raised without antibiotics as a ‘trick to get you to pay more money.’” IDA invested staff time in phoning and emailing individual news outlet to promote the press release.

25. On February 24, 2017, IDA published an action alerts to its members regarding Sanderson titled, “What is Sanderson Farms Trying to Hide From Us?” and it stated in part, Sanderson “promotes its use of antibiotics as harmless, yet it won’t agree to a federal government study to measure the health risks.” IDA Tweeted on February 27, 2017, “Sanderson Farms promotes antibiotic use as harmless, yet won’t agree to a government study.”<sup>10</sup> On February 27,

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<sup>7</sup> The Tweet is posted online at <https://twitter.com/IDAUSA/status/813519996433350656>. The Tweet links to a Huffington Post article that was updated in April 2017, after the date of the Tweet.

<sup>8</sup> The Tweet is posted online at <https://twitter.com/IDAUSA/status/811809315925262336>.

<sup>9</sup> The Facebook post is online at <https://www.facebook.com/indefenseofanimals/posts/10154816354922346>.

<sup>10</sup> This Tweet is posted online at <https://twitter.com/IDAUSA/status/836260037593075712>.

1 2017, IDA asked its Facebook followers to take action, specifically, “Tell Sanderson Farms that if  
2 it wants to promote the use of antibiotics as harmless and safe, that it should be open to scientific  
3 scrutiny.”<sup>11</sup> More than 400 people engaged with the post and more than 70 people shared it.

4 26. On April 22, 2017, IDA’s article in the Huffington Post stated that Sanderson was  
5 confusing the public with its Bob and Dale commercials on antibiotics. Specifically, the article  
6 stated, “Instead of cleaning up its dirty operation, Sanderson Farms is confusing and blurring the  
7 issue in hopes that consumers won’t worry about the industry’s prolific antibiotic use. Guess  
8 what? That makes Sanderson’s warning about marketing gimmicks little more than a marketing  
9 gimmick itself.”

10 27. During the NAD process, Sanderson informed the NAD that IDA used Facebook,  
11 IDA’s website and other social media outlets to notify the public that Sanderson’s advertising was  
12 deceptive and designed to confuse the public. Sanderson also informed the NAD that IDA had  
13 issued an action alert and asked the public to sign a petition to get Sanderson’s ads off the air.  
14 Sanderson told the NAD that IDA’s president had written an article that was published in the  
15 Huffington Post criticizing Sanderson’s advertising. At least some of IDA’s communications  
16 referenced the NAD process, and Sanderson requested that the NAD administratively close the  
17 complaint because of IDA’s communications to the public. In April 2017, the NAD  
18 administratively closed the complaint.

19 28. In July 2017, IDA alerted the public via a blog post and Facebook to the fact that  
20 Sanderson had been sued for false advertising by Friends of the Earth, Center for Food Safety and  
21 the Organic Consumers Association, a lawsuit to which IDA was not a party.

22 29. From July 2017 to 2019, IDA followed the *Friends of the Earth v. Sanderson*  
23 *Farms* lawsuit to determine if Sanderson would be ordered to cease its false and misleading  
24 statements to the public.

25 30. In 2019, IDA continued its work to educate the public regarding Sanderson’s  
26 \_\_\_\_\_

27 <sup>11</sup> The Facebook post is available at  
28 <https://www.facebook.com/indefenseofanimals/photos/a.10150796907537346/10155026421652346/?type=3&theater>.

1 harmful farming practices and Sanderson’s misleading communications to the public about those  
 2 practices. On November 26, 2019, IDA issued an action alert to over 250,000 members and  
 3 activists on IDA’s email list to make its supporters aware of Sanderson’s deceitful  
 4 communications. The action alert stated, in part,

- 5 • “Battle Deceptive Advertising Claims by Mega-Meat Corporations.”
- 6 • “Sanderson Farms claims that its chicken meat is “100% natural.” However,  
 7 Sanderson raises chickens inside of cramped industrial sheds and administers a  
 8 slew of antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals to them prior to their terrifying  
 9 slaughter. This is far from natural in any sense of the term. Please join us in holding  
 10 Sanderson Farms accountable for this deceptive advertising!”

11 31. In that action alert, IDA urged its members to sign a petition regarding Sanderson.  
 12 The petition web page stated, in part, “If Sanderson gets away with spreading this misleading  
 13 information, it will signal to other Big Ag giants that they can do the same.” IDA collected 4,047  
 14 petition signatures. The petition letter stated, in part, “I demand Sanderson Farms immediately  
 15 cease all practices that are inconsistent with its “100% Natural” marketing. These practices  
 16 include, but are not limited to, using antibiotics routinely, selling chicken meat with antibiotic-  
 17 resistant bacteria, and confining chickens exclusively indoors in crowded conditions.”

18 32. IDA also called its supporters to “Battle Deceptive Advertising Claims by Mega  
 19 #Meat Corporations,” and again specifically identified the company by Tweeting on November  
 20 24, 2019, “#SandersonFarms claims that its #chicken meat is ‘100% natural.’ However, it raises  
 21 #chickens inside of cramped industrial sheds with antibiotics to them prior to their terrifying  
 22 slaughter.”<sup>12</sup> Again on November 28, 2019, IDA told its followers, “Today, the majority of animal  
 23 farms rely on antibiotics . . . #SandersonFarms is no exception.”<sup>13</sup> That same day, IDA also asked  
 24 its Facebook followers to send a letter to Sanderson,<sup>14</sup> and then on November 30, 2019, again

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25  
 26 <sup>12</sup> This Tweet is available online at <https://twitter.com/IDAUSA/status/1198663154785497088>.

27 <sup>13</sup> This Tweet is available online at <https://twitter.com/IDAUSA/status/1200142451815723008>.

28 <sup>14</sup> The Facebook post is available at <https://www.facebook.com/indefenseofanimals/posts/10157726790392346>.



1 asked its followers to help “Battle Deceptive Advertising Claims by Mega-Meat Corporations.”<sup>15</sup>

2 33. On April 10, 2020, IDA, working with FoE and Center for Food Safety, issued a  
3 letter to Sanderson specifically raising its concerns with Sanderson’s advertising not meeting  
4 consumer expectations in numerous ways and therefore being misleading. The letter stated, in part,  
5 “We are hopeful that Sanderson will come to the table ready to discuss a global resolution of the  
6 public health, food safety, animal welfare, and consumer protection issues that have caused our  
7 organizations and our members and supporters such great concern.”

8 34. Sanderson responded on April 29, 2020. Instead of addressing any of the public  
9 health, food safety, animal welfare, and consumer protection issues, the letter stated, “Sanderson  
10 reserves its rights to pursue all available remedies should you and your organizations continue to  
11 pursue vexatious litigation based on invented assertions of injury, and Sanderson will aggressively  
12 and vigorously defend itself in any such litigation.”

13 35. After receiving Sanderson’s response, IDA continued to invest staff time in  
14 determining how best to communicate with Sanderson, despite its unwillingness to communicate,  
15 and how to pressure Sanderson to make its marketing truthful. The work culminated in an  
16 additional letter to Sanderson.

17 36. On July 9, 2020, IDA, in cooperation with FoE and Center for Food Safety, sent  
18 another letter to Sanderson to renew its concerns about Sanderson’s deceptive marketing,  
19 Sanderson’s farming practices, and the risk to public health from those farming practices in light  
20 of the coronavirus global pandemic. For example, the letter addressed antibiotic resistance on  
21 poultry products and that antibiotic resistant bacteria are anticipated to kill COVID-19 patients as  
22 they succumb to secondary bacterial pneumonia. The letter also invited Sanderson once again to  
23 come to the table to discuss a resolution.

24 37. As of this filing, Sanderson has not acknowledged receipt or responded.

25 38. IDA’s work regarding Sanderson from 2016 to present has involved the staff time  
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28 <sup>15</sup> The Facebook post is available at  
<https://www.facebook.com/indefenseofanimals/posts/10157731947692346>.

1 of IDA's Farmed Animals Campaign Director, IDA's communications team, and IDA's IT team.

2 ***Friends of the Earth***

3 39. Plaintiff Friends of the Earth is a national non-profit environmental advocacy  
4 organization founded in 1969. FoE has offices in Berkeley, California, and Washington, D.C,  
5 where it is incorporated. Its mission is to defend the environment and champion a healthy and just  
6 world. To this end, FoE promotes policies and actions that ensure the food we eat and the products  
7 we use are sustainable and safe for our health and the environment.

8 40. FoE has more than 325,000 members in all fifty states, of whom more than 56,000  
9 are in California. Additionally, FOE has more than 1.7 million activist supporters on its email list  
10 throughout the United States, with more than 190,000 in California.

11 41. FoE's "Good Food Healthy Planet" program is focused on reducing the harmful  
12 environmental, animal welfare, and public health impacts of industrial animal foods. The program  
13 helps grow the consumer market and policy support for healthier, grass-fed and organic meat and  
14 dairy, and plant-based foods. FoE's program educates the public about the impact of meat  
15 consumption and production, especially related to the issue of antibiotics and other harmful  
16 chemicals in animal products. FoE is a co-author of "Chain Reaction," an annual report and  
17 scorecard that grades America's top restaurant chains on their policies and practices regarding  
18 antibiotic use and transparency in their meat and poultry supply chains. The report also covers the  
19 use of hormones and availability of organic and grass-fed options. FoE has campaigned over the  
20 past several years to eliminate the routine use of antibiotics in animal agriculture, with a focus on  
21 changing the purchasing policies of large restaurant chains that buy large quantities of industrial  
22 meat.

23 42. FoE, which currently has ten staff based in Berkeley, California, co-authored a  
24 report in 2015 titled "Spinning Food: How Food Industry Front Groups and Covert  
25 Communications Are Shaping the Story of Food,"<sup>16</sup> addressing the issues related to chemical-

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28 <sup>16</sup> The report is available at <https://foe.org/news/2015-06-big-food-and-chemical-corporations-spend-millions-to-attack-organic/>, last visited July 2020.

1 intensive industrial agriculture. Berkeley-based FoE staff also educated the public through blog  
2 posts in 2015 titled, “Antibiotic Resistance—with a side order of fries?”<sup>17</sup> FoE’s Berkeley staff  
3 authored “Redefining Good Food at the Nation’s Largest Casual Restaurant Company,”<sup>18</sup> an  
4 article produced as part of the Good Food Now campaign that was partially focused on the need to  
5 change Darden Restaurant’s sourcing practices around industrial meat production and the use of  
6 antibiotics. Sanderson sells its chicken to Darden Restaurants.

7 43. In August 2015, FoE staff, particularly the Deputy Director of Food and  
8 Agriculture, became aware of Sanderson’s business practices by reading a May 2015 Wall Street  
9 Journal article titled, “Sanderson Farms CEO Resists Poultry-Industry Move to Curb Antibiotics:  
10 Chicken processor CEO Joe Sanderson calls public-health concerns over antibiotic-resistant  
11 bacteria overblown.” Given Sanderson’s recalcitrance in addressing antibiotic use concerns,  
12 Friends of the Earth made the strategic decision to address the negative effects of Sanderson’s  
13 unfair business practices and deceptive advertising by pressuring Sanderson’s institutional  
14 customers (e.g. Olive Garden, owned by Darden Restaurants, Inc. (hereinafter, “Darden”)), who  
15 are household names, and also publicly linking those institutional buyers to Sanderson. Friends of  
16 the Earth campaigned intently between 2015 and 2018 to eliminate the routine use of antibiotics in  
17 animal agriculture, with a focus on changing the purchasing policies of large restaurant chains that  
18 buy significant quantities of industrial meat, including from Sanderson. Throughout this  
19 campaign, Olive Garden, owned by Darden and supplied by Sanderson, was Friends of the Earth’s  
20 highest priority campaign target.

21 44. On August 1, 2016, Sanderson publicly announced its refusal to eliminate the  
22 routine use of antibiotics for its chickens. At the same time, Sanderson launched its “Bob and  
23 Dale” advertising campaign, telling consumers that they do not need to worry about antibiotics in  
24 their chicken products. Specifically, Sanderson claimed: “there’s only chicken in our chicken,”  
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26 <sup>17</sup> Blog post available at <https://foe.org/2015-09-antibiotic-resistance-with-a-side-order-of-fries/>,  
27 last visited July 2020.

28 <sup>18</sup> Article available at <https://foodrevolution.org/blog/redefining-good-food-darden-restaurants/>,  
last visited July 2020.

1 and there are “no antibiotics to worry about here,” among other things.

2 45. Friends of the Earth immediately took additional steps to address Sanderson’s  
3 newest deceptive business practices, diverting resources to counteract Sanderson’s misinformation  
4 within days of the August 1, 2016 public statements. On August 3, 2016, Friends of the Earth’s  
5 Deputy Director of the Food and Agriculture Program researched, drafted, and published a blog  
6 post on antibiotics in the food supply and specifically addressed Sanderson Farms’ business  
7 practices, calling the company “recalcitrant.”<sup>19</sup> Friends of the Earth’s antibiotics campaign had not  
8 previously publicly named Sanderson, but in order to counteract the impact of Sanderson’s  
9 unlawful, unfair, and fraudulent business practices, it diverted additional resources from its other  
10 institutional priorities to mount a direct attack on Sanderson’s business practices and promote  
11 greater consumer awareness about these practices. On August 23, 2016, Friends of the Earth sent  
12 an alert to 322,149 supporters which stated:

13 One of Darden’s suppliers is Sanderson Farms – a massive chicken  
14 corporation. While other chicken producers are taking major steps to reduce  
15 antibiotic use, Sanderson is digging in. It’s rejecting the science and  
16 refusing to do the right thing. As long as Darden continues to purchase meat  
17 from Sanderson, it’s contributing to the problem. Tell Darden to dump  
18 Sanderson Farms and other suppliers if they won’t stop contributing to one  
19 of the nation’s leading public health threats.

20 46. This direct attack on Sanderson’s advertising and business practices required  
21 investigation, research, planning, and staff time, and took these resources away from Friends of  
22 the Earth’s core educational and policy work. Due to Sanderson’s unfair business practices,  
23 Friends of the Earth spent at least \$8,900 that it would have spent to advance other programs.

24 47. Throughout August, September, and October 2016, Friends of the Earth  
25 supplemented its public statements, and blog posts, with a push on social media during the period  
26 Sanderson released its “Bob and Dale” advertising campaign and created confusion around its  
27 business practices. Friends of the Earth communicated with the public approximately a dozen  
28 times through social media to address antibiotics, farmed animals, antibiotic resistance, chickens

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<sup>19</sup> This blog post remains publicly available at <https://www.ecowatch.com/mcdonalds-chicken-now-raised-without-antibiotics-1957382218.html>, last visited July 2020.

1 in cramped conditions, and Sanderson's large institutional customer during this time. Friends of  
 2 the Earth also produced evidence of its collaboration with other organizations concerned about  
 3 Sanderson's practices, including researching to whom Sanderson sold its products.

4 48. In September 2017, FoE, along with Center for Food Safety, published "Chain  
 5 Reaction III: How Top Restaurants Rate on Reducing Antibiotics in Their Meat Supply." In a box  
 6 titled "What the Cluck?" the report addressed Sanderson:

### 7 **What the Cluck?**

8  
 9 Despite tremendous progress in the U.S. chicken  
 10 industry toward eliminating the routine use of  
 11 antibiotics, eleven of the top 25 restaurant chains  
 12 received an "F" grade on the Chain Reaction  
 13 Scorecard for the third consecutive year due to lack  
 14 of a meaningful antibiotics policy. The absence of  
 15 progress for some of these companies may be linked  
 16 to a notorious holdout in the chicken industry that  
 17 continues to misuse antibiotics—Sanderson Farms.  
 18 Representatives from Sanderson Farms reported this  
 19 year at an industry presentation that Darden (Olive  
 20 Garden's parent company), Dairy Queen, Arby's, and  
 21 Chili's—all of which received "F's" in this scorecard—  
 22 are Sanderson customers.<sup>61</sup>

23 Sanderson Farms, third largest producer of  
 24 chicken in the U.S., is one of the only major chicken  
 25 producers that has not taken any steps away from  
 26 raising animals with the routine use of antibiotics.  
 27 Last year Sanderson launched a full-fledged, multi-  
 28 million dollar ad campaign to defend its antibiotic  
 use. The ads call their competitors' no-antibiotics  
 claims "marketing gimmicks" that attempt to  
 "trick" consumers into paying more money for their  
 products. Sanderson also alleges that there is no  
 credible science connecting the use of antibiotics  
 in chicken production to antibiotic resistance in  
 humans.<sup>62</sup>

The report's authors urge Olive Garden, Dairy Queen,  
 Arby's, and any other restaurant buying chicken from  
 Sanderson Farms to take a proactive step for public  
 health and source its chicken from a supplier that has  
 committed or is willing to commit to a responsible  
 antibiotics use policy.

49. Based in part on the above injuries, FoE and Center for Food Safety filed a lawsuit against Sanderson under California’s Unfair Competition Law and False Advertising Law. After two years of litigation, the district court erroneously determined on July 31, 2019, that FoE and Center for Food Safety did not have standing and the Plaintiffs were denied an opportunity to litigate the merits of Sanderson’s false and misleading advertising. *Friends of the Earth v. Sanderson Farms, Inc.*, C. 17-03592, 2019 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 127964 (N.D. Cal. July 31, 2019). This decision is currently on appeal.

50. Sanderson’s false and misleading advertising and marketing continued. In 2019, FoE reengaged its supporters, members, and the public regarding Sanderson’s harmful farming practices and Sanderson’s misleading communications to the public about those practices. On November 26, 2019, FoE issued an action alert to 452,959 members and activists on FoE’s email list to make its supporters aware of Sanderson’s deceitful communications. The action alert stated, in part:

- “Factory farmed chicken isn’t ‘100% natural’: Tell Sanderson to stop lying to customers.”
- “The time is now to demand that Sanderson either produce chicken that meets consumer expectations for ‘100% natural’ or stop lying to consumers. There is power in numbers – can we count on your voice?”

51. In that action alert, FoE urged its members to sign a petition regarding Sanderson. The petition web page stated, in part, “If Sanderson gets away with spreading this misleading information, it will signal to other Big Ag giants that they can do the same.” FoE collected 7,421 petition signatures. The petition letter stated, in part, “I demand Sanderson Farms immediately cease all practices that are inconsistent with its “100% Natural” marketing. These practices include, but are not limited to, using antibiotics routinely, selling chicken meat with antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and confining chickens exclusively indoors in crowded conditions.”

52. FoE surveyed its members regarding their chicken purchases and the factors that their members consider when choosing which chicken to purchase.

53. On April 10, 2020, FoE, working with IDA and Center for Food Safety, issued a

1 letter to Sanderson specifically raising its concerns with Sanderson's advertising not meeting  
2 consumer expectations in numerous ways and therefore being misleading. The letter stated, in part,  
3 "We are hopeful that Sanderson will come to the table ready to discuss a global resolution of the  
4 public health, food safety, animal welfare, and consumer protection issues that have caused our  
5 organizations and our members and supporters such great concern."

6 54. Sanderson responded on April 29, 2020. Instead of addressing any of the public  
7 health, food safety, animal welfare, and consumer protection issues, the letter stated, "Sanderson  
8 reserves its rights to pursue all available remedies should you and your organizations continue to  
9 pursue vexatious litigation based on invented assertions of injury, and Sanderson will aggressively  
10 and vigorously defend itself in any such litigation."

11 55. After receiving Sanderson's response, FoE continued to invest staff time in  
12 determining how best to communicate with Sanderson, despite its unwillingness to communicate,  
13 and how to pressure Sanderson to make its marketing truthful. The work culminated in an  
14 additional letter to Sanderson.

15 56. On July 9, 2020, FoE, in cooperation with IDA, sent another letter to Sanderson to  
16 renew its concerns about Sanderson's deceptive marketing, Sanderson's farming practices, and the  
17 risk to public health from those farming practices in light of the global pandemic. For example, the  
18 letter addressed antibiotic resistance on poultry products and that antibiotic resistant bacteria are  
19 anticipated to kill COVID-19 patients as they succumb to secondary bacterial pneumonia. The  
20 letter also invited Sanderson once again to come to the table to discuss a resolution.

21 57. As of this filing, Sanderson has not acknowledged receipt or responded.

22 58. FoE's work regarding Sanderson from 2016 to present has involved the staff time  
23 of FoE's Deputy Director of Food and Agriculture, FoE's communications team, and FoE's IT  
24 team.

25 59. Defendant's practices and advertising not only injured Plaintiffs, but they also  
26 injured FoE member, Richard Fogel.

27 60. Richard Fogel is a FoE member who resides in Redwood City, California.

28 61. Fogel is an active FoE member. In the last year, Fogel has participated in



1 approximately twenty FoE actions.

2 62. Fogel purchased Sanderson Farms Chicken Products at a Foods Co. in California  
3 for many years. He was exposed to both the newspaper advertisements and the product's label  
4 promising "100% Natural" chicken.

5 63. Fogel chose Sanderson's Products because Sanderson touted its Products as more  
6 natural than others and he understood the Products to be antibiotic free. Fogel believed that  
7 Sanderson did not use antibiotics to raise its chickens and therefore it was not possible for any  
8 antibiotic or pharmaceutical residue to remain on the product. Fogel did not know that Sanderson  
9 employs farming practices that contribute to antibiotic resistant bacteria. If he had known any of  
10 that, he would not have bought the products. He additionally understood the Sanderson Products  
11 marketed as "100% Natural" to be free from artificial ingredients and that the chickens were raised  
12 free range or range free and eating off the land. Fogel understood from Sanderson's  
13 representations that the chickens were raised humanely.

14 64. Fogel discovered Sanderson's practices did not align with its advertising and  
15 marketing in 2020.

16 **Defendant**

17 65. Defendant Sanderson Farms, Inc. is a corporation organized and existing under the  
18 laws of the State of Mississippi. Its principal place of business and headquarters are maintained at  
19 127 Flynt Road, Laurel, Mississippi. Sanderson is a publicly traded company with annual revenue  
20 routinely exceeding \$3 billion. In Fiscal Year 2019, Sanderson processed 4.6 billion pounds of  
21 chickens with sales of more than \$3.4 billion.<sup>20</sup>

22 66. Sanderson sells its chicken through supermarket chains throughout the country and  
23 through other outlets.

24 67. Defendant Sanderson disseminates the false representation that the Products are  
25 "100% Natural" in a widespread national advertising campaign, including on its website, in

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26  
27  
28 <sup>20</sup> Sanderson Farms, Investor Relations website, available at <http://ir.sandersonfarms.com/>, last visited July 2020.



1 television, radio and internet commercials, in print advertising, and on trucks and billboards.

2 68. In addition, Sanderson encourages resellers and supermarket chains to use images  
3 of the Products in their print and internet advertisements in order to “promote the sale of  
4 Sanderson Farms 100% natural chicken.”<sup>21</sup> The pictures below are examples of the type of  
5 advertising used in flyers in supermarkets:



<sup>21</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/corporate/media-library/product-imagery/>, last visited July 2020.

**PRICES VALID JANUARY 7 THRU JANUARY 13, 2019**

**IGA**

**SLICED FREE!**  
Hormel Always Tender  
**Whole Boneless Center Cut Pork Loin**  
**1.79 LB.**  
SAVE \$1.20 LB.

**100% Natural, Grade A Sanderson Farms Boneless Skinless Fryer Breast**  
**1.99 LB.**  
SAVE \$1.00 LB.  
LIMIT 2 PER CUSTOMER

**3 LB. BAG**  
**Satsumas Mandarins or Florida Honeybell Oranges**  
**4.88**

**BOX TOPS FOR EDUCATION! BUY. SCAN. EARN.**  
Use the App or go to [www.boxtopswin.com](http://www.boxtopswin.com) to print out a mail-in form now! Find more details.

6.9-10.9 Oz. Select Varieties  
**Totino's Party Pizza or Pizza Rolls**  
**10/\$10**

4.7-8.4 Oz. Select Varieties  
**Hamburger, Chicken or Tuna Helper**  
**10/\$10**

2.25-3.75 Oz. Select Varieties  
**Nabisco Go Cups**  
**79¢**

6 Pk./5 Liter Bottles Select Varieties  
**Coke Products**  
**4/\$11**  
WHEN YOU BUY 4 OR 3.99 EACH

50 Oz. Tide Liquid Detergent, 20 Ct. Tide Pods or 160 Ct. Bounce Fabric Softener  
**4.99**  
WHEN YOU BUY ANY 5 Participating Items

12 Roll Charmin Essentials Bath Tissue or 6 Roll Bounty Paper Towels  
**3.99**  
WHEN YOU BUY ANY 5 Participating Items

2.6-3.8 Oz. Select Varieties Old Spice or Secret Premium Deodorant  
**1.49**  
WHEN YOU BUY ANY 5 Participating Items

**P&G** **BUY 5, SAVE \$5** **MIX & MATCH!**  
When you buy 5 participating items. All items must be purchased in a single transaction.



1           69. Defendant also labels the Products “100% Natural.”

2           70. Plaintiffs challenge the pictures of the Products, which include the labels, when  
3 they are used for purposes of advertising in flyers, circulars, print ads or other media.

4           71. Currently, three poultry producers dominate the market, with Sanderson sitting in  
5 third place.

6           72. Of the top three poultry producers, only Sanderson does not offer at least some  
7 poultry that has never been exposed to antibiotics. Instead, Sanderson uses its “100% Natural”  
8 claims and advertising to compete with the top two producers’ lines of antibiotic-free poultry.

9           73. Defendant Sanderson ships its Products to purchasers, resellers, and distributors in  
10 California and throughout the country. Sanderson is responsible for the claims and advertisements  
11 for its Products, including on its website where it specifically discusses the “100% Natural”  
12 claims<sup>22</sup> and makes the representations discussed here regarding the Products. According to  
13 Sanderson’s 2019 report to its shareholders, since 2004 Sanderson has been working to gain public  
14 awareness and acceptance of its product as a “natural product” an effort that Sanderson continues  
15 today.<sup>23</sup> Sanderson also stated that it launched campaigns in fiscal 2016 and 2017 “to explain and  
16 support the Company’s position regarding the judicious use of antibiotics to prevent illness and  
17 treat chickens that become ill” and “to dispel many of the myths about poultry production.” These  
18 efforts are designed to mislead consumers into believing that Sanderson chicken, like its more  
19 expensive competitors, was raised without antibiotics.

20           74. Sanderson knows the value of antibiotic-free representations. Sanderson (and  
21 competitor Perdue Farms) once brought a Lanham Act claim against Tyson Foods, Inc., a leading  
22 competitor and one of the top three poultry producers in the United States, for running ads saying  
23 that Tyson chicken was “raised without antibiotics.” *Sanderson Farms, Inc. v. Tyson Foods Inc.*,  
24 Civ. No. 08-210 (D.Md. filed Jan 25, 2008). Sanderson argued that Tyson was, in fact, using  
25 antibiotics to raise its chicken and should be enjoined from running the ads. The court granted the

26 \_\_\_\_\_  
27 <sup>22</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/100-natural/>, last visited July 2020.

28 <sup>23</sup> This report is available at <http://ir.sandersonfarms.com/index.php/static-files/dd7be81d-df8a-4e22-b267-89cc6e9dcc89>, last visited July 2020.

1 injunction.

2 75. Sanderson is responsible for the claims and advertisements for its Products,  
3 including on its website where it specifically discusses the “100% Natural” claims<sup>24</sup> and makes  
4 the representations discussed regarding the Products.

## 5 **FACTUAL BACKGROUND**

### 6 **Sanderson Chicken Products**

7 76. Sanderson’s Chicken Products, all of which are marketed as “100% Natural”  
8 include the following:<sup>25</sup>

- 9 • Clipped Chicken Tenderloins
- 10 • Boneless Skinless Chicken Thigh Fillets
- 11 • Boneless Skinless Breast Strips
- 12 • Thinly Sliced Boneless Skinless Breast Fillets
- 13 • Boneless Skinless Breast Fillets
- 14 • Best of Boneless
- 15 • Boneless Skinless Breast Chunks
- 16 • Family Pack Whole Legs
- 17 • Whole Legs
- 18 • Family Pack Wingettes
- 19 • Wingettes
- 20 • Drumsticks & Thighs Combo
- 21 • Skinless Drumsticks
- 22 • Chicken Hearts
- 23 • Value Pack Chicken Gizzards
- 24 • Skinless Split Breast

25  
26  
27 <sup>24</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/100-natural/>, last visited August 27, 2019.

28 <sup>25</sup> Discovery may indicate that additional products should be included within the scope of this Complaint, and Plaintiffs reserve the right to add those products.

- 1 • Family Pack Chicken Tenderloins
- 2 • Chicken Tenderloins
- 3 • Family Pack Boneless, Skinless Chicken Breast Fillets with Rib Meat
- 4 • Skinless Thighs
- 5 • Family Pack Thighs
- 6 • Thighs
- 7 • Value Pack Thighs
- 8 • Value Pack Leg Quarters
- 9 • Value Pack Wings
- 10 • Value Pack Drumsticks
- 11 • Value Pack Split Breasts
- 12 • Chicken Necks
- 13 • Wing Drumettes
- 14 • Family Pack Drumsticks
- 15 • Family Pack Thighs
- 16 • Family Pack Leg Quarters
- 17 • Whole Roasting Chicken
- 18 • Pick of the Chicken
- 19 • Family Pack Wings
- 20 • Family Pack Split Breasts
- 21 • Livers Chicken Gizzards
- 22 • Stripped Back Portions
- 23 • Wings
- 24 • Thighs
- 25 • Drumsticks
- 26 • Split Breasts
- 27 • Whole Cut-Up Chicken with Giblets and Neck
- 28 • Whole Frying Chicken (Whole Young Chicken).

77. An example of Sanderson's Chicken Products is reproduced here:<sup>26</sup>



78. The Chicken Products are available for purchase under the Sanderson Farms brand at retail locations throughout California at stores such as Albertsons, Vons, Food 4 Less, Foods Co, and WinCo Foods,<sup>27</sup> and nationally with the Sanderson Farms logo in stores such as Wal-Mart, Kroger and some Kroger-owned chains, Safeway, and Sam's Club.

79. Sanderson markets and advertises its Chicken Products nationally, and seeks to reach consumers through commercials on television, print advertising, radio advertising, email newsletters, billboard advertising, and online marketing such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest and its own website.

### **Sanderson's Extensive National False and Misleading Advertising, Including Its "100% Natural" Representations**

80. In an extensive national advertising campaign, Sanderson misleads consumers into believing its chickens are not raised with pharmaceuticals or antibiotics; that the chickens are

<sup>26</sup> Plaintiffs challenge (1) the advertising of these products including the label used as advertising, for example, in flyers sent out by grocery stores and markets in keeping with Sanderson's advertising guidelines. Sanderson encourages resellers to use images like the one in ¶ 77 in their print and internet advertisements in order to "promote the sale of Sanderson Farms 100% natural chicken." See <https://sandersonfarms.com/corporate/media-library/product-imagery/>, last visited July 2020. Accordingly, Sanderson is responsible for the content of the flyers and circulars. Plaintiffs also challenge (2) the product labels as false and misleading.

<sup>27</sup> Sanderson Farms, "Find A Store," <http://www.sandersonfarms.com/store-finder/>, last visited July 2020.

1 raised in a natural environment; that the use of antibiotics in poultry cannot promote the evolution  
 2 of antibiotic-resistant bacteria; and that the Products cannot possibly have any antibiotic or  
 3 pharmaceutical residue when sold.

4 81. In addition to specific false and misleading statements described below, Sanderson  
 5 uses the phrase “100% Natural” in different contexts throughout its advertising to bolster these  
 6 misrepresentations. Sanderson repeatedly makes false “100% Natural” representations in various  
 7 media—television, website, social media, print magazines, radio advertising, billboards, trucks,  
 8 etc.—when in fact its chicken production process and resulting products do not meet reasonable  
 9 consumer expectations for products advertised as “100% Natural.”

10 82. The use of the term “natural,” let alone “100% Natural,” is a powerful statement  
 11 that is important to consumers.

12 83. A 2015 Consumer Reports<sup>28</sup> survey found that 62% of consumers purchase  
 13 “natural” products, and that 87% of those purchasers are willing to pay more for products called  
 14 “natural” that meet their expectations as to what “natural” means.<sup>29</sup> A 2016 survey found the  
 15 number of consumers who purchase “natural” products to be as high as 73%.<sup>30</sup>

16 84. According to surveys by Consumer Reports, the meaning of the term “natural,”  
 17

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18 <sup>28</sup> Consumer Reports, founded in 1936, is “an independent, nonprofit member organization that  
 19 works side by side with consumers for truth, transparency, and fairness in the marketplace.” It has  
 20 six million members and tests tens of thousands of products annually to provide consumers with  
 21 product reviews. Consumer Reports, “About Us”, available at  
 22 <https://www.consumerreports.org/cro/about-us/what-we-do/index.html>, last visited July 2020. CR  
 23 has a Survey Research department that conducts more than one hundred surveys per year. Its  
 24 surveys are not commissioned or financed by industry. Available at  
 25 <https://www.consumerreports.org/cro/about-us/what-we-do/research-and-testing/index.html>, last  
 26 visited July 2020. In October 2018, CR published a front page story on its monthly magazine  
 27 titled, “What’s Really in Your Meat?” Available at [https://www.consumerreports.org/food-](https://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/are-banned-drugs-in-your-meat/)  
 28 [safety/are-banned-drugs-in-your-meat/](https://www.consumerreports.org/food-safety/are-banned-drugs-in-your-meat/), last visited July 2020. The article title for the online  
 version is “Are Banned Drugs in Your Meat ?”.

<sup>29</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Natural Food Labels Survey” (2015), at 2,  
 previously available at [http://greenerchoices.org/wp-](http://greenerchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2016_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf)  
[content/uploads/2016/08/2016\\_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf](http://greenerchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2016_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf), last visited August 30, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Food Labels Survey” (2016), at 5, available at  
[https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Natural-and-Antibiotics-](https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Natural-and-Antibiotics-Labels-Survey-Public-Report-1.pdf)  
[Labels-Survey-Public-Report-1.pdf](https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Natural-and-Antibiotics-Labels-Survey-Public-Report-1.pdf), last visited July 2020).

1 even isolated from Sanderson's many other specific misrepresentations, conveys a message  
 2 entirely at odds with the reality of Sanderson's practices. For example, 88% of consumers expect  
 3 that meat with a "natural" label meant that the meat "came from an animal whose diet was natural  
 4 and free of chemicals, drugs and other artificial ingredients."<sup>31</sup>

5 85. Further, 50% of consumers believe use of the term "natural" means that the animals  
 6 went outdoors,<sup>32</sup> and 83% expect that the "natural" label means the animal was raised in a natural  
 7 environment.<sup>33</sup>

8 86. Friends of the Earth commissioned a consumer survey in 2019 specific to  
 9 Sanderson's advertising. Survey respondents viewed one of Sanderson's video commercials and  
 10 then were asked what they understood about Sanderson. Over half, 51%, of survey respondents  
 11 understood Sanderson to be communicating in the video commercial that it *never* uses antibiotics  
 12 with its chickens, directly contrary to Sanderson's routine use in every flock.

13 87. Other survey respondents viewed Sanderson's website. After viewing Sanderson's  
 14 "100% Natural" representations on the website accompanied by the "with nothing added"  
 15 statement, 61% believed that Sanderson *never* uses antibiotics, directly contrary to Sanderson's  
 16 routine use in every flock.

17 **Allegations Concerning the Misrepresentation That the Chickens Are Not Raised**  
 18 **With Antibiotics Or Pharmaceuticals**

19 88. Sanderson misleads consumers into believing its chickens are raised without  
 20 antibiotics or pharmaceuticals. Its carefully crafted message makes constant use of the "100%  
 21 Natural" representation in conjunction with advertising that attacks competitors who use the term  
 22 "raised without antibiotics." Sanderson says that "raised without antibiotics" is a meaningless  
 23 statement because, Sanderson says, "all chickens must be cleared of antibiotics when they leave  
 24 \_\_\_\_\_

25 <sup>31</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, "Food Labeling Poll" (2007), at 15, not available  
 26 online.

27 <sup>32</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, "Natural Food Labels Survey" (2015), at 4, not  
 28 available online.

<sup>33</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, "Food Labeling Poll" (2007), at 15, not available  
 online.



1 the farm.” The message is that all chickens, including Sanderson’s, are the same because they do  
2 not have any antibiotics.

3 89. The likely reason Sanderson embarked on this antibiotics ad campaign, in lieu of  
4 labeling the Chicken Products with antibiotics language, is because the United States Department  
5 of Agriculture (USDA) would not let Sanderson use the phrase “raised without antibiotics” on its  
6 packaging like its competitors do, because Sanderson routinely feeds antibiotics to its chickens. In  
7 order to use the phrase “raised without antibiotics” on the label, the USDA requires that the source  
8 animals were not given antibiotics in their feed, water or by injection. Poultry producers must  
9 apply for and obtain permission to make claims on their labels regarding antibiotics.

10 90. Since Sanderson cannot lawfully label its chickens with antibiotics language like its  
11 competitors do, Sanderson instead avoids this this prohibition by trying to trick consumers with its  
12 unregulated ad campaign into believing that its chickens are the same as those of its competitors.

13 91. The phrase “raised without antibiotics” is important to consumers. A 2007  
14 Consumer Reports survey found that six out of ten Americans would pay more for meat/poultry  
15 with the ‘raised without antibiotics’ label and 89% of consumers say all meat companies should be  
16 required to disclose the amount and type of antibiotics used.<sup>34</sup>

17 92. As a result, in an end run around government regulation, Sanderson tries to trick  
18 consumers into believing that no chicken contains antibiotics and the “raised without antibiotics”  
19 statement on the packaging of its competitors is meaningless verbiage and that its chickens are the  
20 same as those bearing the “raised without antibiotics” statement.

21 93. This message is hammered home in several television and web commercials.

22 94. In a “Bob and Dale” television commercial called “The Truth About Chicken:  
23 Supermarket,” Sanderson states that by federal law all chickens must be cleared of antibiotics  
24 when they leave the farm and makes the point that all chickens in the supermarket are free of  
25 antibiotics, including Sanderson’s. This commercial has over 90 million impressions on television

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26  
27 <sup>34</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Natural and Antibiotics Labels Survey” (2018),  
28 available at <https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Natural-and-Antibiotics-Labels-Survey-Public-Report-1.pdf> (last visited July 2020).

1 and over six million views on YouTube and Facebook.

2 95. Sanderson misleads consumers by stating: “Some chicken companies try to get you  
3 to spend more money by using labels like ‘raised without antibiotics.’ At Sanderson Farms, we  
4 don’t believe in gimmicks like that.” The commercial then shows a person piling a variety of  
5 chicken brands, selected while blindfolded, into a cart and saying, “no antibiotics to worry about  
6 here.”

7 96. This statement is misleading because the message the commercial conveys is that  
8 no chicken (including Sanderson’s) contains antibiotics, and that the phrase “raised without  
9 antibiotics” is a “gimmick.” Sanderson places itself on the same plane as its competitors who do  
10 not raise chickens with antibiotics. In reality, Sanderson uses antibiotics, while some of its key  
11 competitors do not.



18 97. The thirty-second commercial ends by showing the above panel for four seconds.

19 98. In another “Bob and Dale” commercial, “The Truth About Chicken: Mr. Floppy  
20 Arms” Sanderson makes the same points, calling its competitors’ statement “raised without  
21 antibiotics”: “full of hot air and doesn’t say much”; “a trick to get you to pay more money” and “a  
22 marketing gimmick.” The thirty-second commercial ends with the same “100% Natural” panel  
23 and has over 100 million impressions on television.

24 99. In “Marketing Guru,” Bob and Dale ridicule a Madison Avenue ad executive who  
25 “likes to use the phrase ‘raised without antibiotics.’” Bob and Dale state that the phrase was  
26 invented to make chicken sound safer but is meaningless. The thirty-second commercial ends with  
27 the same “100% Natural” panel and has over 80 million impressions on television.

28 100. In the commercial “Truth About Chicken: Labels,” Sanderson calls the claim that

competitors' chickens are raised without antibiotics a ruse to "trick people and charge higher prices" and "marketing speak." Sanderson then says it feeds its chickens a healthy, balanced diet full of vitamins and "animal protein like they naturally eat" and notes that "labels can be misleading." Sanderson does not disclose that it uses either antibiotics or pharmaceuticals in the feed.

101. The deception regarding pharmaceutical use, including antibiotics, is also made in at least one 2016 video<sup>35</sup> titled, "How We Grow Our Chicken." In the video a Corporate Veterinarian describes Sanderson's hatchery process and states, "This single combined injection under the shell is the only time we inject antibiotics, leaving little opportunity for resistance to develop and no residues in the grown broilers weeks later when they go to market." Sanderson continues, "At no point are Sanderson Farms broilers ever injected with anything and there are never any antibiotic residues in our broilers when they go to market."

102. This representation is misleading for several reasons: First, although Sanderson is careful to limit its statement to "injections," Sanderson operates its own feed mills, and routinely adds pharmaceuticals and antibiotics to the chickens' feed.

103. Second, Sanderson contradicts itself regarding whether Sanderson injects broiler chickens or not, by stating that it injects antibiotics into the shells of the chickens' eggs, but not the chickens themselves.

104. Sanderson gives the impression that the chickens are raised without using synthetic feed or injections by playing on the nuances in regulated and unregulated terms such as "no antibiotics ever," "raised without antibiotics," and Sanderson's claim of being "cleared" of antibiotics.

105. One YouTube viewer expressed confusion by commenting, "'is the only time we use antibiotics'. I thought you guys said all Chickens in the US are supposedly antibiotic free or that you guys don't use them?"<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=275&v=Fghbb4IYaiU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=275&v=Fghbb4IYaiU) (last visited July 2020).

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

106. Consumer surveys support the allegation that Sanderson’s use of the ubiquitous “100% Natural” representation misleads reasonable consumers into believing the chickens are raised without antibiotics.

107. Consumer Reports has performed several surveys on food marketing, including in 2007,<sup>37</sup> 2008,<sup>38</sup> 2015,<sup>39</sup> 2016,<sup>40</sup> and 2018.<sup>41</sup>

108. The 2015 survey found that when “natural” is used to describe meat and poultry:

- a. 57% of consumers think that no antibiotics or other drugs were used;
- b. 61% of consumers think that the animals’ feed contained no artificial ingredients or colors and 59% think that there were no GMOs in the feed;
- c. 88% of consumers expect that meat with a “natural” label meant that the meat “came from an animal whose diet was natural and free of chemicals, drugs and other artificial ingredients.”<sup>42</sup>

109. Sanderson’s other main competitors have product lines that are brought to market wholly without antibiotics and Sanderson’s advertising misleads consumers into believing that Sanderson follows the same practices.

110. Sanderson makes the same misrepresentation on its website. It has represented its chicken as “100% Natural” on the homepage of its website and states that its chicken is “nothing

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<sup>37</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Food Labeling Poll” (2007), not available online.

<sup>38</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Food-Labeling Poll 2008” (2008), available at <http://4bgr3aepis44c9bxt1ulxsyq.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/foodpoll2008.pdf>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Natural Food Labels Survey” (2015), available at <https://foodpolitics.com/wp-content/uploads/Consumer-Reports-Natural-Food-Labels-Survey-Report.pdf>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Food Labels Survey” (2016), previously available at [http://greenerchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2016\\_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf](http://greenerchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2016_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf), last visited August 30, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Natural and Antibiotics Labels Survey” (2018), available at <https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Natural-and-Antibiotics-Labels-Survey-Public-Report-1.pdf>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Food Labeling Poll” (2007), at 15, not available online.

1 but the safest, most wholesome poultry, with nothing added.”<sup>43</sup> A similar statement and  
 2 accompanying graphic persists elsewhere on Sanderson’s website.<sup>44</sup>

3  
 4 **100%**  
 5 **Natural**

6 We believe that delicious, quality chicken should be able  
 7 to stand on its own. Always. At Sanderson Farms, we  
 8 pride ourselves in delivering nothing but the safest, most  
 9 wholesome poultry, with nothing added. So you know  
 10 what you're getting every time.

11 **Learn More** >

12 111. The “Learn More” button on the homepage took consumers to a webpage devoted  
 13 to its “100% Natural” representation.<sup>45</sup>

14 112. This page stated “There’s Only Chicken In Our Chicken. Seriously.”<sup>46</sup> and “No  
 15 Additives Or Artificial Ingredients. Not Ever.”<sup>47</sup>



19  
 20 **No Additives**  
 21 **Or Artificial**  
 22 **Ingredients.**  
 23 **Not Ever.**  
 24

25  
 26 <sup>43</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/>, last visited August 29, 2019.

27 <sup>44</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/natural-protein/>, last visited July 2020.

28 <sup>45</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/100-natural/>, last visited August 29, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/100-natural/>, last visited August 30, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.*

113. Sanderson did not disclose its use of antibiotics or pharmaceuticals in the feed given to its chickens on the “Learn More” page and still does not disclose its routine use.

114. Elsewhere on its website, Sanderson also makes the following statements to further mislead consumers into thinking that Sanderson does not routinely use pharmaceuticals in raising the chickens:

- “That means no additives, no unpronounceable ingredients, nothing extra. Just 100% natural chicken that’s healthy and a treat for your taste buds.”<sup>48</sup>
- “100% Natural. We firmly stand behind our commitment to keep things the way nature intended.”<sup>49</sup>
- “The Myth: The myth is, only chicken raised without antibiotics are safe to eat. The Truth: The truth is, none of the chicken you buy in the grocery store contains antibiotics. By federal law, all chickens must be clear of antibiotics before they leave the farm.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See at <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/100-natural/>, last visited August 30, 2019. Since plaintiffs originally sued Sanderson for false advertising and unfair competition, Sanderson has updated its website and the address above routes to <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/natural-protein/>, last visited July 2020. This updated website continues to make the identical or similar statements as of this filing.

<sup>49</sup> See at <https://sandersonfarms.com/?s=subscribe>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>50</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/chicken-myths/#2nd>, last visited July 2020.

115. In a video on its website, Sanderson touts the nutritional value of the chickens' "corn and soy-based diets"<sup>51</sup> but omits any mention of pharmaceuticals and antibiotics.



116. In addition, Sanderson maintains on its website<sup>52</sup> a "Christmas TV Commercial" linked to YouTube using the same "100% Natural" tagline.

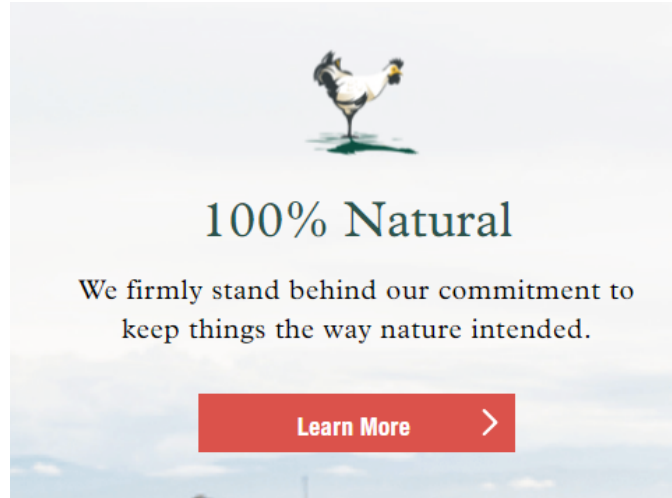


<sup>51</sup> See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=80&v=Fghbb4IYaiU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=80&v=Fghbb4IYaiU), last visited July 2020.

<sup>52</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/corporate/media-library/brand-assets/>, last visited July 2020.



117. Sanderson also represents that the Products are “100% Natural” on its current newsletter subscription webpage and further adds that: “We firmly stand behind our commitment to keep things the way nature intended.”<sup>53</sup>



118. Sanderson further emphasizes its representation of “100% Natural” message by sending a monthly 100% Natural Newsletter to over 600,000 annual readers across 42 different states.<sup>54</sup> Sanderson has continued to publish this newsletter in 2020.<sup>55</sup>

119. Sanderson advertises the Products as “100% Natural” in print magazines across the country.

120. Sanderson advertises itself as “100% Natural” via radio.

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<sup>53</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/?s=subscribe>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>54</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/press-releases/sanderson-farms-awarded-twenty-public-relations-advertising-awards/>, last visited July 2020.

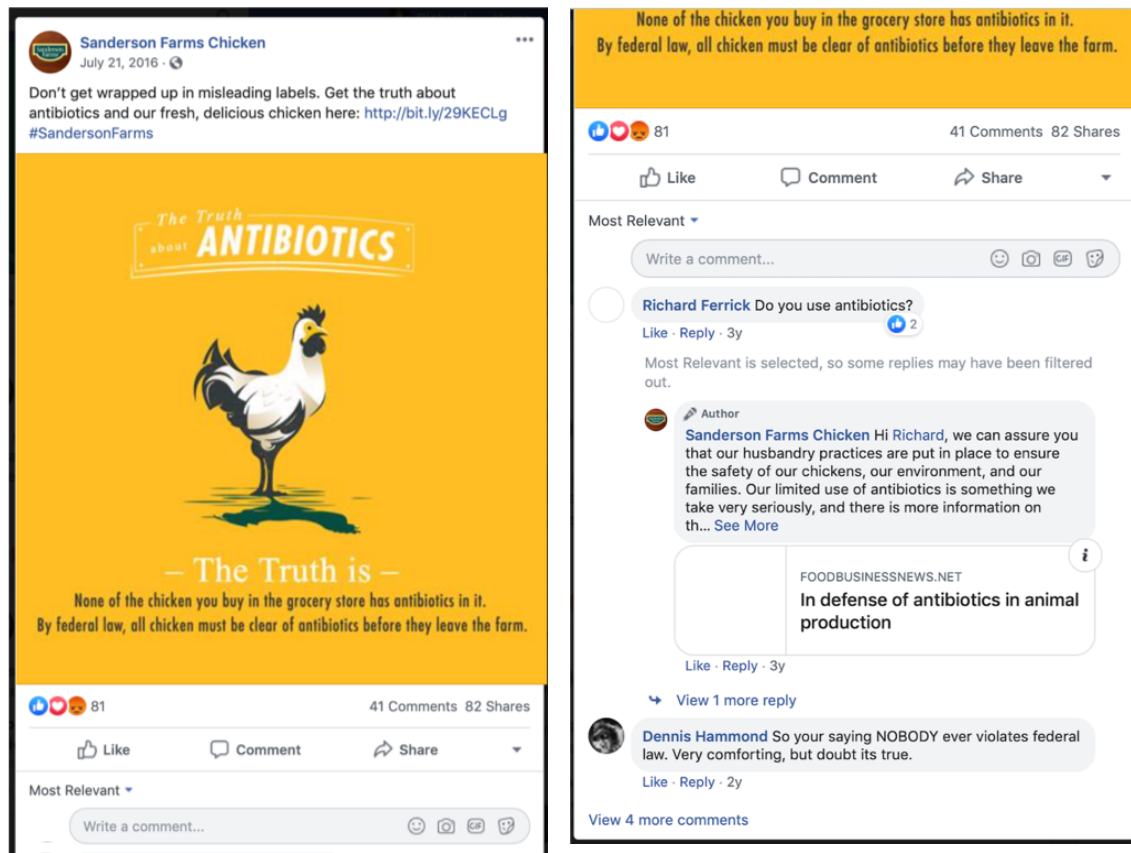
<sup>55</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/blogs/section/100-natural-newsletter/>, last visited July 2020.



121. Sanderson Farms trucks advertise “100% Natural” on the sides:



122. In another Facebook post Sanderson also refers to its “limited use” instead of informing the public of its routine use of antibiotics:

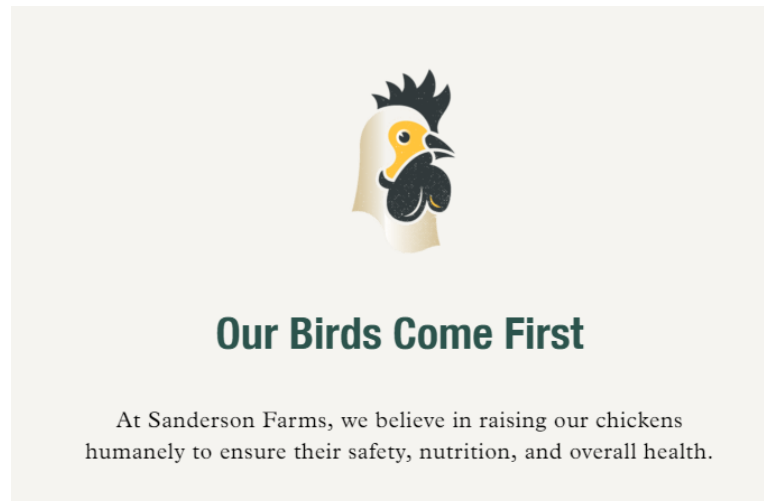


123. All of these statements were made within the applicable statute of limitations, and many continue as of this filing.

### **Allegations Concerning the Misrepresentation That the Chickens Are Raised Outdoors In A Natural Environment**

124. Sanderson's representations would mislead a reasonable consumer into believing its chickens were raised in a natural environment and in a humane manner.

125. In addition to the "100% Natural" claims discussed *supra*, Sanderson, addressing animal welfare on its website, represents that "At Sanderson Farms, we believe in raising our chickens humanely to ensure their safety, nutrition, and overall health."



126. Sanderson reinforces this claim and the general false impression of high animal welfare standards with recent TV commercials of chickens being given pricey gifts from humans and chickens dining in restaurants, a TV commercial titled "Old MacGimmick,"<sup>56</sup> and in the past, images of chickens playing volleyball and sipping lemonade.

127. On its website, Sanderson states that "The truth is, none of the chicken you buy in a store is raised in a cage. Chickens are raised in spacious, climate-controlled houses where they are free to eat, drink, and walk around all they want."<sup>57</sup>

128. The houses are also described as "a comfortable, cage-free environment" where

<sup>56</sup> See <https://www.ispot.tv/ad/w10S/sanderson-farms-old-macgimmick?autoplay=1>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>57</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/chicken-myths/#4th>, last visited July 2020.

1 “our chickens live in a spacious, climate-controlled environment with unlimited access to food and  
2 water. The only time our chickens are caged is for their safety when they’re being transported  
3 from the farm to the processing plant.”<sup>58</sup>

4 129. According to a 2016 Consumer Reports survey,<sup>59</sup> a significant portion of  
5 consumers would be misled by Sanderson’s statements regarding how it treats its birds.  
6 Specifically, 82% of consumers think that a “humanely raised” representation, such as the one  
7 Sanderson makes on its website, *supra* ¶ 125, means that the farm was inspected to verify this  
8 claim, 77% think the animals had adequate living space, 68% think the animals went outdoors,  
9 and 65% think the animals were raised in houses with clean air.<sup>60</sup>

10 130. In addition, in 2007 Consumer Reports Natural Research Center reported that when  
11 the word “natural” is used to describe poultry, let alone Sanderson’s claim of “100% Natural,”  
12 50% of consumers think that the animals went outdoors,<sup>61</sup> and 83% expect the “natural” label  
13 meant that the animal was raised in a natural environment.<sup>62</sup>

14 131. Sanderson’s statements on how it treats its chickens are false and misleading  
15 because in reality, Sanderson’s chickens are raised in crowded industrial sheds (that also  
16 contribute to the growth of antibiotic resistant bacteria), and the chickens are raised in intensive  
17 confinement, only indoors,<sup>63</sup> where they never get sunlight except when they are transported for  
18 slaughter.

21 <sup>58</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/animal-welfare/>, last visited July 2020.

22 <sup>59</sup> Food Labels Survey (2016), previously available at [http://greenerchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2016\\_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf](http://greenerchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2016_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf), last visited September 3, 2019.

23 <sup>60</sup> *Id.* at 16.

24 <sup>61</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Natural Food Labels Survey” (2015), at 4, previously available at <http://4bgr3aepis44c9bxt1ulxysq.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/foodpoll2008.pdf>, last visited August 30, 2019.

25 <sup>62</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Food Labeling Poll” (2007), at 15, not available online.

26 <sup>63</sup> The industry standard, including Sanderson, is indoors. “Almost all the chickens eaten in the  
27 United States, and increasingly in the rest of the world, have been raised for decades in this  
28 manner: always indoors, always under artificial light, always eating only what the farmer  
supplies.” Maryn McKenna, “Big Chicken,” (2017), available at  
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/book/big-chicken/id1217089199?mt=11>.

132. As for the crowding and stocking density inside chicken sheds, an industry guide recommended 1.097 to 1.180 square feet per bird. The industry standard for a grow-out house is 20,000 birds or more, with eight-tenths of a square foot per bird.<sup>64</sup> Sanderson reported that it lost 2.1 million birds in Hurricane Florence who were housed in 70 grow-out sheds; that is approximately 30,000 birds per shed,<sup>65</sup> even more than the 25,000 to 27,000 birds per shed identified by Sanderson's veterinary staff. A reasonable consumer would not think that industrial sheds with approximately 25,000 to 30,000 birds with approximately one square foot per bird is "natural."

133. Sanderson also subjects its birds to cruel, inhumane treatment. A 2016 investigation at the Kinston, N.C. hatchery farm has revealed the horrific conditions in which Sanderson's chicks are left to die.<sup>66</sup> The Animal Welfare Institute, based on the USDA inspection records, determined that the Sanderson chicken plant in Collins, Mississippi, was one of the nine worst chicken plants of three hundred surveyed for animal cruelty.<sup>67</sup> AWI also found that two Sanderson plants have been cited at least 20 times for not complying with humane handling standards<sup>68</sup> (the Palestine, Texas facility had 20 humane handling reports in 2015-2016, and the Kinston, North

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<sup>64</sup> National Chicken Council, "Animal Welfare for Broiler Chickens," available at <https://www.nationalchickencouncil.org/industry-issues/animal-welfare-for-broiler-chickens/#one>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Mother Jones, "These Photos of Submerged North Carolina Livestock Farms Are Devastating," <https://www.motherjones.com/food/2018/09/these-photos-of-submerged-north-carolina-livestock-farms-are-devastating/>, last visited July 2020; *see also* <https://sandersonfarms.com/press-releases/sanderson-farms-inc-provides-update-hurricane-florence-damage/>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>66</sup> PETA, "Chicks Dropped Live Into Mincer at Chicken Supplier of Kroger, Arby's," available at <https://investigations.peta.org/?s=arby%27s> and <https://www.peta.org/media/news-releases/exposed-chicks-left-suffer-die-chicken-meat-supplier-kroger-arbys/>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>67</sup> *See* Animals 24-7, "Pilgrim's Pride & Case Farms have "worst chicken plants for animal cruelty," say Animal Welfare Institute & Farm Sanctuary," available at <https://www.animals24-7.org/2014/11/22/pilgrims-pride-case-farms-have-worst-chicken-plants-for-animal-cruelty-say-animal-welfare-institute-farm-sanctuary/>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Animal Welfare Institute, "New Report Exposes Pattern of Animal Mistreatment in Some US Poultry Plants," available at <https://awionline.org/press-releases/new-report-exposes-pattern-animal-mistreatment-some-us-poultry-plants>, last visited July 2020.

1 Carolina facility had 22 reports for 2011-2014).<sup>69</sup> The Palestine violations included, among others,  
 2 excessive use of force, improper sorting of “DOAs and live birds” and birds drowning in the scald  
 3 tank. In 2016, a USDA inspector determined the plant’s slaughtering process was “out of control”  
 4 for the scald tank violations and noted that similar incidents had taken place before.<sup>70</sup>

5 **Allegations Concerning the Misrepresentation That There Is No Evidence the Use of**  
 6 **Antibiotics in Poultry Contributes to The Evolution of Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria**

7 134. Based on Sanderson’s advertising, a reasonable consumer would believe  
 8 Sanderson’s “100% Natural” claim means that its chickens were raised in a manner that does not  
 9 contribute to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

10 135. As described *supra* ¶¶ 88-123, Sanderson goes to great lengths to conceal the fact  
 11 that it uses pharmaceuticals and antibiotics in the feed.

12 136. Coupled with the numerous representations that its chickens are “100% Natural,”  
 13 and its repeated statements to the effect that “raised without antibiotics” is a marketing gimmick to  
 14 which no attention need be paid in the comedic Bob and Dale commercials, *supra* ¶¶ 94-99,  
 15 Sanderson seeks to convince consumers that their concerns about the evolution of antibiotic-  
 16 resistant bacteria are something to be laughed off.

17 137. However, this is an important issue to consumers. According to the 2016 Consumer  
 18 Reports survey, 65% of consumers are concerned that feeding antibiotics or other drugs to animals  
 19 leads to antibiotic resistant bacteria,<sup>71</sup> and the 2018 survey showed that 77% of consumers were  
 20 concerned that feeding antibiotics to farm animals would make drugs less effective for humans.<sup>72</sup>  
 21 Of those, 43% were either “extremely” or “very” concerned.

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23 <sup>69</sup> Animal Welfare Institute, “The Welfare of Birds At Slaughter In The United States - 2017  
 24 Update”, at 9, available at [https://awionline.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/FA-AWI-](https://awionline.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/FA-AWI-Welfare-of-Birds-at-Slaughter-Update.pdf)  
 25 [Welfare-of-Birds-at-Slaughter-Update.pdf](https://awionline.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/FA-AWI-Welfare-of-Birds-at-Slaughter-Update.pdf), last visited July 2020.

26 <sup>70</sup> *Id.*

27 <sup>71</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Food Labels Survey” (2016), at 10, previously  
 28 available at [http://greenerchoices.org/wp-](http://greenerchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2016_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf)  
[content/uploads/2016/08/2016\\_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf](http://greenerchoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/2016_CRFoodLabelsSurvey.pdf), last visited July 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Consumer Reports National Research Center, “Natural and Antibiotics Labels Survey” (2018),  
 available at [https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Natural-and-](https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Natural-and-Antibiotics-Labels-Survey-Public-Report-1.pdf)  
[Antibiotics-Labels-Survey-Public-Report-1.pdf](https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Natural-and-Antibiotics-Labels-Survey-Public-Report-1.pdf), last visited July 2020.

1 138. Sanderson further downplays the risk of the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria  
 2 by telling consumers “no antibiotics to worry about here,” and “the truth is, none of the chicken  
 3 you buy in the grocery store contains antibiotics. By federal law, all chickens must be clear of  
 4 antibiotics before they leave the farm.”<sup>73</sup>

5 139. Sanderson’s misrepresentations about the risks of the evolution of antibiotic-  
 6 resistant bacteria stemming from agricultural use of antibiotics have been so egregious that a  
 7 neutral third party, the Council of Better Business Bureaus, National Advertising Division (NAD),  
 8 concluded on August 11, 2017 that key claims in Sanderson’s advertising are misleading and that  
 9 Sanderson should stop making those claims:

10 NAD also determined that given the lack of any consensus in the scientific  
 11 community over the safety of consuming meat from animals raised using  
 12 antibiotics the advertiser [Sanderson] should discontinue from its advertising  
 13 language that characterizes the ‘raised without antibiotics’ labels on competitive  
 14 chicken producers’ products as a ‘marketing gimmick,’ ‘just a trick to get you to  
 pay more money,’ a claim that is ‘full of hot air and doesn’t say much,’ ‘a phrase  
 [that marketers] invented to make chicken sound safer ... and it doesn’t mean  
 much’ and similar language.<sup>74</sup>

15 140. However, Sanderson doubles down on its efforts to minimize the importance of “no  
 16 antibiotics” statements which are valuable to consumers, but which Sanderson is not lawfully  
 17 allowed to use.

18 141. Sanderson contends, “...we are aware of no credible scientific research that  
 19 supports the notion that the use of antibiotics that are important to human medicine when treating  
 20 chickens contributes to the development of human bacterial infections that are resistant to  
 21

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22 <sup>73</sup> This statement appeared on the homepage of Sanderson’s website, available at  
 23 <https://sandersonfarms.com/>, last visited August 30, 2019; on the hyperlink “Truth About Chicken”  
 24 that appeared right below the statement, to debunk “myths” about antibiotics, still available at  
 25 <https://sandersonfarms.com/chicken-myths/#2nd>, last visited July 2020; and in a video “How We  
 26 Grow Our Chicken,” available at <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/animal-welfare/>, last  
 visited July 2020. The grow-out video appears to have been revised in December 2019. Similar  
 statements are repeated by Sanderson in its Bob and Dale TV advertisements.

27 <sup>74</sup> Advertising Self-Regulatory Council, Press Release, available at  
 28 [http://www.asrcreviews.org/nad-recommends-sanderson-farms-discontinue-claims-about-tricks-  
 gimmicks-finds-company-can-support-certain-claims-referencing-federal-law/](http://www.asrcreviews.org/nad-recommends-sanderson-farms-discontinue-claims-about-tricks-gimmicks-finds-company-can-support-certain-claims-referencing-federal-law/), last visited July  
 2020.



1 treatment....”<sup>75</sup>

2 142. Contrary to Sanderson’s assertion of “no credible evidence” many studies from  
3 credible sources have concluded that the use of antibiotics in livestock risks rendering those  
4 antibiotics less useful to humans:

- 5 a. The World Health Organization’s 2014 report, titled Antimicrobial Resistance:  
6 Global Report on Surveillance, stated, “[t]he classes of antibiotics used in food-  
7 producing animals and in human drugs are mostly the same, thereby increasing  
8 the risk of emergence and spread of resistant bacteria, including those capable  
9 of causing infections in both animals and humans. Food-producing animals are  
10 reservoirs of pathogens with the potential to transfer resistance to humans.”<sup>76</sup>
- 11 b. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of  
12 Health and Human Services, summarized the threat to public health posed by  
13 antibiotic use in agricultural operations, such as Sanderson Farms:  
14 Antibiotics are widely used in food-producing animals, and according to data  
15 published by FDA, there are more kilograms of antibiotics sold in the United  
16 States for food-producing animals than for people [hyperlink omitted]. This use  
17 contributes to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in food-producing  
18 animals. Resistant bacteria in food-producing animals are of particular concern  
19 because these animals serve as carriers. Resistant bacteria can contaminate the  
20 foods that come from those animals, and people who consume these foods can  
21 develop antibiotic-resistant infections. Antibiotics must be used judiciously in  
22 humans and animals because both uses contribute to not only the emergence,  
23 but also the persistence and spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.<sup>77</sup>

24  
25  
26 <sup>75</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/policy-on-animal-welfare-and-antibiotic-use/>, last visited July 2020.

27 <sup>76</sup> World Health Organization, Antimicrobial Resistance: Global Report on Surveillance at 59,  
28 available at [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/112642/1/9789241564748\\_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/112642/1/9789241564748_eng.pdf?ua=1), last visited July 2020 (internal citations omitted).

<sup>77</sup> Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States (2013), at 36-37, available at

- c. According to the President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology and its Report to the President on Combatting Antibiotic Resistance, “[s]ubstantial evidence demonstrates that use of antibiotics in animal agriculture promotes the development of antibiotic-resistant microbes in animals and that retail meat can be a source of microbes, including antibiotic-resistant microbes.”<sup>78</sup>
- d. A 2017 review of the research to date concludes, “taken together, the data support what the scientific community, national governments, and international organizations such as the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, and the World Organization for the Health of Animals (OIE) have long recognized: antimicrobial use on farms clearly contributes to the emergence of resistance and poses a human public health risk.”<sup>79</sup>
- e. Approximately 70% of all medically important antibiotics sold in the United States are for livestock use.<sup>80</sup>
- f. An estimated 35,000 deaths and more than 2.8 million antibiotic-resistant

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<https://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/pdf/ar-threats-2013-508.pdf>, last visited July 2020. The report also contains a glossary of terms related to antibiotic resistance.

<sup>78</sup> Report to the President on Combatting Antibiotic Resistance, Executive Office of the President of the United States (September 2014), at 50, available at [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/PCAST/pcast\\_carb\\_report\\_sept2014.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/PCAST/pcast_carb_report_sept2014.pdf), last visited July 2020.

<sup>79</sup> Hoelzer et al., BMC Veterinary Research (2017) 13:211, “Antimicrobial drug use in food-producing animals and associated human health risks: what, and how strong, is the evidence?,” at 35, available at [https://link.springer.com/epdf/10.1186/s12917-017-1131-3?author\\_access\\_token=CbmeckJjS4XscxgMn92-6rm\\_BpE1tBhCbnbw3BuzI2RMGFJmV0iy8Y06YFc2zc-R5jN1X3crDybEToB\\_CzXCpRozpkwGnxg9ydolzETVy02VGkppjTRq1V0MGiTqrqtB8g2U114wU4Fb9RacLAHWYIA%3D%3D](https://link.springer.com/epdf/10.1186/s12917-017-1131-3?author_access_token=CbmeckJjS4XscxgMn92-6rm_BpE1tBhCbnbw3BuzI2RMGFJmV0iy8Y06YFc2zc-R5jN1X3crDybEToB_CzXCpRozpkwGnxg9ydolzETVy02VGkppjTRq1V0MGiTqrqtB8g2U114wU4Fb9RacLAHWYIA%3D%3D), last visited July 2020..

<sup>80</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Antibiotics and Animal Agriculture: A Primer* (February 2018) [https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2018/02/arp\\_antibiotics\\_and\\_animal\\_agriculture\\_a\\_primer.pdf](https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2018/02/arp_antibiotics_and_animal_agriculture_a_primer.pdf), last visited July 2020.



infections occur in the U.S. each year, as estimated in 2019 by the CDC.<sup>81</sup> This is an increase in deaths and infections previously reported by the CDC in 2013.

g. Children experience the ill-effects of antibiotic overuse in agriculture, most especially children younger than 5 years who become infected with antibiotic resistant bacteria.<sup>82</sup>

143. Because Sanderson is aware of the studies cited above, Sanderson is aware of further research on the elevated risk of poultry workers carrying bacteria that is resistant to the same antibiotics that Sanderson admits to using.

144. Indeed, “credible evidence” of antibiotic-resistant bacteria has been found on Sanderson’s own chicken,<sup>83</sup> and this is consistent with the scientific research on antibiotic use in poultry. Sanderson’s routine use for every flock contributes to antibiotic resistance and this resistance poses a threat to public health during the pandemic, see *supra* ¶¶ 3-5.

#### **Allegations Concerning the Misrepresentation That the Products Do Not, and Cannot, Contain Unnatural Residues**

145. A reasonable consumer believes that Sanderson’s “100% Natural” representation means that the Products do not and cannot contain residues, such as pharmaceutical or biological residues.

146. Specifically, Sanderson represents itself as “100% Natural” in multiple media and Sanderson asserts “no antibiotics to worry about here” in TV advertisements. On its website and other advertisements, Sanderson states: “There’s Only Chicken In Our Chicken. Seriously.”<sup>84</sup> See

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<sup>81</sup> Center for Disease Control, Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States, 2019, available at <https://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/biggest-threats.html#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20report%2C%20more,people%20die%20as%20a%20result.,> last visited July 2020.

<sup>82</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, Technical Report (December 2015), “Nontherapeutic Use of Antimicrobial Agents in Animal Agriculture: Implications for Pediatrics,” at e1673, available at <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/136/6/e1670.full.pdf>, last July 2020.

<sup>83</sup> National Resources Defense Council, *Sanderson Farms: Spreading Deception & Antibiotic Resistance*, available at <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/sanderson-farms-spreading-deception-antibiotic-resistance>, last visited July 2020.

<sup>84</sup> See <https://sandersonfarms.com/our-chickens/100-natural/>, last visited July 2020.

1 *e.g. supra* ¶ 95.

2 147. Sanderson also misrepresents to consumers the level of protection that they can  
3 expect from the federal law regarding antibiotic residues. In one of the Bob and Dale TV  
4 advertisements,<sup>85</sup> Sanderson says, “The thing is, by federal law, all chickens must be cleared of  
5 antibiotics before they leave the farm . . . No antibiotics to worry about here.” This statement is  
6 misleading because it omits the fact that USDA’s own process allows for chickens with  
7 scientifically detectable antibiotic residues to be sold to consumers, as long as the detected  
8 residues stay below the regulatory “tolerance.”

9 148. Sanderson’s representations regarding its chicken being free of residues are  
10 misleading because Sanderson’s own laboratory testing indicates that the pharmaceuticals  
11 Sanderson administers remain in some of the chickens after they leave the grow-out facilities and  
12 arrive at processing plants to be slaughtered. The pharmaceuticals that Sanderson administers  
13 include, but are not necessarily limited to, bacitracin, gentamicin, lincomycin, monensin, narasin,  
14 oxytetracycline, penicillin, rofenaid (Rofenaid is a brand name; the drug is sulfadimethoxine  
15 ormetprim), salinomycin, and virginiamycin.<sup>86</sup>

16 149. Sanderson conducts its own laboratory testing for the residues of pharmaceuticals  
17 that Sanderson administers, and Sanderson’s own testing indicates positive results for the  
18 pharmaceuticals that Sanderson administers to its flocks at various stages of their lives. These  
19 positive pharmaceutical results include, but are not necessarily limited to, decoquinate, monensin,  
20 narasin, nicarbazine, and salinomycin. Discovery may reveal additional residues.

21 150. Sanderson also uses anhydrous ammonia as a refrigerant to freeze processed  
22 chickens, as observed by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in finding against Sanderson regarding  
23 Occupational Health and Safety Administration violations.<sup>87</sup>

24  
25  
26 <sup>85</sup> See <https://www.ispot.tv/brands/A1Z/sanderson-farms>, last visited July 2020).

27 <sup>86</sup> Order, *Friends of the Earth et al. v. Sanderson Farms, Inc.*, No. 3:17-cv-03592 (RS), Dkt. 94  
(N.D. Cal. Aug. 27, 2018).

28 <sup>87</sup> *Sanderson Farms, Inc. (Production Division) v. Occupational Safety and Health Review  
Comm.*, No. 19-60592 (5th Cir. July 9, 2020).

## Allegations Concerning the Reach and Scope of Sanderson's Misrepresentations

151. Sanderson began its "100% Natural" marketing campaign at least as far back as 2014. In its "I Believe" series of commercials which were released on YouTube, Sanderson concluded by wishing viewers "Happy Fourth of July" "Happy Thanksgiving" "Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays" with a voiceover "And we mean that 100%." along with the logo and "100% Natural":



152. The "Bob and Dale" commercials began airing in 2016.<sup>88</sup> They were broadcast in markets where Sanderson chicken was sold and were also put online.

153. The term "impressions" is used to measure how many times a commercial has been seen.

154. The Bob and Dale commercial "Labels" had 41,961,833 broadcast impressions.

155. The Bob and Dale commercial "Cooking Show" had 56,953,090 broadcast impressions.

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<sup>88</sup> The numbers were captured during the campaign on June 9, 2017 and have undoubtedly increased since then. Current numbers are not publicly available.

156. The Bob and Dale commercial “Supermarket” had 108,214,520 broadcast impressions.

157. The Bob and Dale commercial “Marketing Guru” had 89,745,934 impressions.

158. The Bob and Dale commercial “Floppy Arms” had 116,413,306 broadcast impressions.

159. The Bob and Dale commercials were also seen millions of times online.

160. The Bob and Dale commercial “Labels” had 1,675,972 views on YouTube and 32,000 on Facebook.

161. The Bob and Dale commercial “Cooking Show” had 310,223 views on YouTube and 2.5 million views on Facebook.

162. The Bob and Dale commercial “Supermarket” had 2,137,612 views on YouTube and 4 million views on Facebook.

163. The Bob and Dale commercial “Marketing Guru” had 1,021,876 views on YouTube and 711,000 views on Facebook.

164. The Bob and Dale commercial “Floppy Arms” had 753,431 views on YouTube and 2.4 million views on Facebook.

<b>“Bob and Dale” Commercial</b>	<b>Broadcast Impressions</b>	<b>YouTube Views</b>	<b>Facebook Views</b>
Truth About Chicken – Labels Commercial	41,961,833	1,675,972	32,000
The Truth About Chicken - Marketing Guru Commercial:	89,745,934	1,021,876	711,000
The Truth About Chicken - Mr. Floppy Arms Commercial	116,413,306	753,431	2,400,000
The Truth About Chicken – Supermarket Commercial	108,214,520	2,137,612	4,000,000
Truth About Chicken - Cooking Show Commercial	56,953,090	310,223	2,900,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>332,518,683</b>	<b>5,899,114</b>	<b>10,043,000</b>

1           165. The Bob and Dale commercials aired in 2016 and 2017 on widespread television  
2 shows like *College Basketball* on CBS, *48 Hours* on CBS and *Sunday Morning* on CBS.

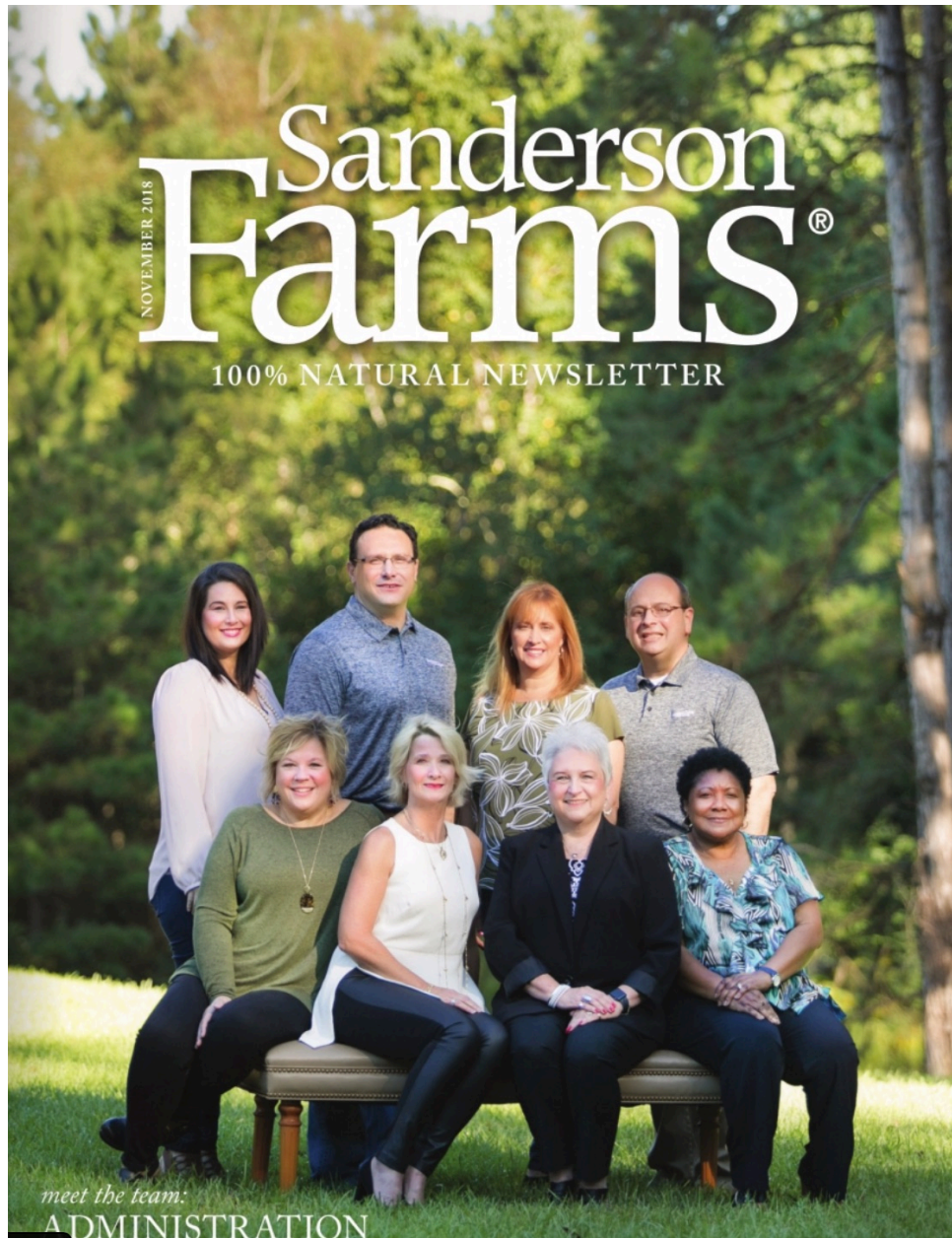
3           166. Sanderson's print advertising also reached a wide audience.

4           167. For example, in 2018, Sanderson Farms also placed a print ad stating that its  
5 chicken was "All Natural" in *Southern Living*, a national magazine which, according to its 2019  
6 media guide, has print reach of 16,081,000 and a digital reach of 7.3 million unique users.<sup>89</sup>

7           168. Sanderson Farms also publishes a monthly magazine, the *Sanderson Farms 100%*  
8 *Natural Newsletter*, which as of 2018, had a circulation of 600,000 across 42 states, which has the  
9 "100% Natural" claim as part of every title on the front of the magazine:  
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27 <sup>89</sup> Southern Living, 2019 Media Kit, available online at  
28 [https://www.southernliving.com/sites/default/files/sl\\_2019\\_mediakit\\_final\\_lores.pdf](https://www.southernliving.com/sites/default/files/sl_2019_mediakit_final_lores.pdf), last visited  
July, 2020.





169. The *Sanderson Farms 100% Natural Newsletter* is sufficiently prominent that it won numerous public relations awards including a Gold ADDY award.<sup>90</sup> The ADDY awards are

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<sup>90</sup> Sanderson Farms press release May 7, 2018, available at <https://sandersonfarms.com/press-releases/sanderson-farms-awarded-twenty-public-relations-advertising-awards/>, last visited July 2020.



1 the “advertising industry’s largest and most representative competition.”<sup>91</sup>

2 170. Sanderson also won several public relations awards for its *Sanderson Farms*  
3 *Corporate Responsibility Report*, including one the Southern Public Relations Association of  
4 Mississippi Judge’s Choice Award and an award from the Southern Public Relations Federation.<sup>92</sup>

5 171. In addition, the “100% Natural” representation, in the form of pictures of the  
6 products such as those in ¶ 77 *supra*, has appeared in millions of copies of flyers and circulars  
7 where Sanderson Chicken is sold.

8 172. Such pictures have appeared in flyers and circulars for major supermarket chains  
9 that sell Sanderson chicken, including Wal-Mart, Sam’s Club, Kroger (which owns much of Food  
10 4 Less and other regional chains), Safeway, H-E-B (340 stores in Texas), Albertson’s (400 stores  
11 in the United States), Von’s (200 stores in California and Nevada), Food 4 Less (337 stores in the  
12 United States), and Harris Teeter (230 stores in the United States). Sanderson chicken is sold in  
13 thousands of stores in the United States.

14 173. Every retail package of Sanderson chicken bears the phrase “100% Natural.” The  
15 labels represent an enormous and widespread “100% Natural” message to consumers, which is the  
16 message Sanderson encourages retailers to use in their ad circulars.<sup>93</sup>

17 174. In Sanderson’s 2019 annual report filed with the SEC,<sup>94</sup> it noted that its efforts to  
18 distinguish itself in the market as a “natural” brand went back to 2004:

19 The Registrant has achieved a high level of public awareness and acceptance of  
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21 <sup>91</sup> American Advertising Federation website, available at  
22 [https://www.aaf.org/AAFMMemberR/Press\\_Room/2011/ADDY\\_Winners.aspx?WebsiteKey=4a2b61a4-ccf6-4069-b7fb-9bea5afaf2f1](https://www.aaf.org/AAFMMemberR/Press_Room/2011/ADDY_Winners.aspx?WebsiteKey=4a2b61a4-ccf6-4069-b7fb-9bea5afaf2f1), last visited July 2020.

23 <sup>92</sup> Sanderson Farms press release May 7, 2018. available at <https://sandersonfarms.com/press-releases/sanderson-farms-awarded-twenty-public-relations-advertising-awards/>, last visited July  
24 2020.

25 <sup>93</sup> Sanderson maintains product imagery at the following address  
26 <https://sandersonfarms.com/corporate/media-library/product-imagery/>, last visited July 2020.  
27 There Sanderson states: “To help you advertise Sanderson Farms products at the retail level,  
28 we’ve created a database of professional images for use in print and Internet advertisements to  
promote the sale of Sanderson Farms *100% natural chicken*.”(emphasis added).

<sup>94</sup> Sanderson Farms 2019 Annual Report to Shareholders, available at  
<http://ir.sandersonfarms.com/index.php/static-files/dd7be81d-df8a-4e22-b267-89cc6e9dcc89>, last  
visited July 2020.

its products in its core markets. Brand awareness is an important element of the Registrant's marketing philosophy, and it intends to continue brand name merchandising of its products. During calendar 2004, the Company launched an advertising campaign designed to distinguish the Company's fresh chicken products from competitors' products. The campaign noted that the Company's product is a natural product free from salt, water and other additives that some competitors inject into their fresh chicken. The Company continues to use various media to communicate this message today.

Sanderson also described its recent campaigns to promote itself as a "natural" brand:

During fiscal 2016, the Company launched a multi-media advertising campaign designed to explain and support the Company's position regarding the judicious use of antibiotics to prevent illness and treat chickens that become ill. During fiscal 2017, the Company launched a multi-media advertising campaign designed to dispel many of the myths about poultry production. The Company regularly evaluates the success of this campaign and, while not currently advertising aggressively on television, expects to continue to use the campaign in other media, at least for the near term.

## **CAUSES OF ACTION**

### **FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION**

#### **Violation of the Unfair Competition Law,**

#### **Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 17200, *et seq.***

175. The allegations made in all preceding paragraphs are re-alleged and incorporated by reference herein.

176. Sanderson engaged in unlawful, unfair, and/or fraudulent conduct under the California UCL, California Business & Professions Code § 17200, *et seq.*, by advertising and labeling its Chicken Products as "100% Natural," plus other representations listed above, when in fact, Sanderson knows that the process by which it creates its Chicken Products and the resulting product itself does not meet reasonable consumer expectations for a product marketed as "100% Natural."

177. Sanderson's conduct is unlawful because it violates the Poultry Products Inspection Act, 21 U.S.C. § 451 *et seq.*, which prohibits labeling that is false or misleading in any particular, § 453(h) and its implementing regulations, including 9 C.F.R. § 381.129(a), requiring that, "No

1 poultry product . . . shall have any false or misleading labeling . . .” Sanderson’s conduct is  
 2 unlawful because it violates the Federal Trade Commission Act, 15 U.S.C. § 45, which prohibits  
 3 unfair or deceptive acts or practices affecting commerce, and prohibits any false advertisements  
 4 related to food, § 52. Sanderson’s conduct is unlawful because it violates the Magnusson-Moss  
 5 Warranty Act, 15 U.S.C. § 2301, which prohibits a food supplier from making false, fraudulent or  
 6 misleading representations to consumers regarding consumer products. Sanderson’s conduct is  
 7 unlawful because it violates the California False Advertising Law, California Business &  
 8 Professions Code § 17500 *et seq.*, described more fully in the Second Claim for Relief below.  
 9 Sanderson’s conduct is unlawful because it violates express warranty law, Cal. Comm. Code §  
 10 2313, which prohibits Sanderson from making any affirmation of fact or promise to a buyer for  
 11 goods when the goods do not conform to the description provided. Sanderson’s conduct is  
 12 unlawful because it violates the California Consumers Legal Remedies Act, Cal. Civ. Code § 1750  
 13 *et seq.*, which prohibits representing that the Products have characteristics, uses or benefit that  
 14 they do not have; representing that the products are of a particular standard, quality, or grade when  
 15 they are not; advertising the products with the intent not to sell them as advertised. Sanderson’s  
 16 conduct is unlawful because it violates the California Meat and Poultry Inspection Act  
 17 (“CMPIA”), Cal. Food & Agr. Code § 1 *et seq.*, which imposes and enforces requirements “equal  
 18 to those imposed and enforced under the . . . Poultry Products Inspection Act.” Cal. Food & Agr.  
 19 Code § 18692. Like the PPIA, California’s poultry regulations deem misbranded any poultry  
 20 product with labeling that is “false or misleading in any particular.” Cal. Food & Agr. Code §  
 21 18781.

22 178. Sanderson’s conduct is unfair in that it offends established public policy and/or is  
 23 immoral, unethical, oppressive, unscrupulous, and/or substantially injurious to Plaintiffs,  
 24 Plaintiffs’ members, and California consumers. The harm to Plaintiffs arising from Sanderson’s  
 25 conduct outweighs any legitimate benefit Sanderson derived from the conduct. Sanderson’s  
 26 conduct undermines and violates the stated spirit and policies underlying the FAL and other legal  
 27 regulations as alleged herein. Sanderson’s conduct is unfair because it routinely uses  
 28 pharmaceuticals, including antibiotics, to all birds in a flock, throughout the majority of their lives,

1 which sometimes results in residues remaining in the product. Sanderson's conduct is unfair  
2 because of its routine use of multiple antibiotics, thus contributing to the growth of antibiotic-  
3 resistant bacteria. Sanderson's conduct is unfair because it confines birds in crowded sheds in  
4 inhumane conditions and Sanderson's plants have been cited for excessive use of force.

5 179. Sanderson's advertising actions and practices with regard to the food product and  
6 process constitute fraudulent business practices in violation of the UCL because, among other  
7 things, they are likely to deceive reasonable consumers. For example, Sanderson marketed its  
8 chicken products as "100% Natural" when in fact it is not. As a direct and proximate result of  
9 Sanderson's violations, Plaintiffs suffered injury in fact because they were forced to divert  
10 substantial organizational resources away from their core missions. Sanderson's unlawful  
11 encouragement of such practices have frustrated Plaintiffs' efforts to promote transparency in the  
12 food system.

13 180. Plaintiffs seek (a) injunctive relief in the form of an order requiring Sanderson to  
14 cease the acts of unfair competition alleged here and to correct its advertising, promotion, and  
15 marketing campaigns; (b) the payment of Plaintiffs' attorneys' fees and costs pursuant to, inter  
16 alia, California Code of Civil Procedure Section 1021.5.; and (c) interest at the highest rate  
17 allowable by law.

18 181. Plaintiffs do not seek to impose, directly by themselves or indirectly through any  
19 state agency, requirements with regard to the premises, facilities or operations that are in addition  
20 to, or different than, the requirements of the Poultry Products Inspection Act (PPIA), 21 U.S.C. §  
21 451 et seq.

22 182. Plaintiffs do not seek to impose, directly by themselves or through any state  
23 agency, requirements with regard to marking, labeling, packaging or ingredient requirements  
24 found by the USDA Secretary to unduly interfere with the free flow of poultry products in  
25 commerce that are in addition to, or different than, the PPIA.

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**SECOND CAUSE OF ACTION**

**Violation of the False Advertising Law,**

**Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 17500 et seq.**

183. The allegations made in all preceding paragraphs are re-alleged and incorporated by reference herein.

184. Sanderson publicly disseminated untrue or misleading advertising, or intended not to sell the Chicken Products as advertised, in violation of California FAL, California Business & Professions Code § 17500, *et seq.*, by advertising its Chicken Products as “100% Natural,” plus other representations listed above, when in fact, Sanderson knew, or in the exercise of reasonable care should have known, that the process by which it creates its Chicken Products and the product itself does not meet reasonable consumer expectations for a product marketed as “100% Natural.”

185. As a direct and proximate result of Sanderson’s violations, Plaintiffs suffered injury in fact because they were forced to divert substantial organizational resources away from their core missions. Sanderson’s unlawful practices have frustrated Plaintiffs’ efforts to promote transparency in the food system on behalf of the general public.

186. Plaintiffs seek (a) injunctive relief in the form of an order requiring Sanderson to cease the acts of unfair competition alleged here and to correct its advertising, promotion, and marketing campaigns; (b) the payment of Plaintiffs’ attorneys’ fees and costs pursuant to, *inter alia*, California Code of Civil Procedure Section 1021.5.; and (c) interest at the highest rate allowable by law.

**PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

**WHEREFORE**, Plaintiffs, on behalf of themselves, their members, and the general public, pray for judgment as follows:


- A. Declare that Sanderson violated the UCL and the FAL;
- B. Order an award of injunctive relief as permitted by law or equity, including enjoining Sanderson from continuing the unlawful practices as set forth here, and ordering Sanderson to engage in a corrective advertising campaign;

- 1 C. Order Sanderson to pay fees and litigation costs, including a reasonable allowance  
2 for fees for Plaintiffs' attorneys and experts, and reimbursement of Plaintiffs'  
3 expenses, pursuant to California Code of Civil Procedure Section 1021.5, the  
4 common-law private-attorney-general doctrine, or any other available statute or  
5 doctrine;
- 6 D. Order Sanderson to pay both pre- and post-judgment interest on any amounts  
7 awarded; and
- 8 E. Order such other and further relief as may be just and proper.
- 9


10 Dated: July 31, 2020

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