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Animal Welfare Approved Introduces the Only Audited Certification Program in the U.S. for Farms Coexisting with Predators

WASHINGTON, D.C. (August 6, 2012) - Farmers and ranchers taking steps to coexist with some of our most important native predator species will benefit from a new third-party audited certification program audited by Animal Welfare Approved (AWA), designed specifically to assess as well as reward wildlife conservation practices achieved at the farm or ranch level.

Following a three-year partnership project with Predator Friendly¹, and the Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network (which has now subsumed the Predator Friendly[®] label under its global umbrella)², AWA³, widely recognized as the most trusted food label when it comes to animal welfare and sustainable farming, is proud to announce the development of the "Certified Wildlife Friendly[®]" program, which incorporates comprehensive standards and third-party auditing procedures to assess key wildlife conservation practices on farms and ranches across the U.S. and Canada.

Native predator species, such as coyotes, bears, wolves and mountain lions, are critical to the functioning of ecosystems, helping to keep nature in balance. As livestock farms and ranches have expanded, however, problems have frequently occurred where predators come into direct contact with farmed animals, such as sheep and cattle. By adopting mixes of non-lethal strategies and techniques, such as scheduling pasture use when predation pressure is low and using guardian dogs to deter predators, farmers and ranchers can keep livestock safe and wildlife alive without resorting to lethal control measures. Using these techniques reduces the risk of conflict between farming and conservation objectives.

The new "Certified Wildlife Friendly[®]" program is designed identify products from farmers and ranchers who are committed to coexistence with our native predators. The program was developed to meet the demands of the growing number of conscientious consumers seeking these products. Farmers and ranchers who undergo a third-party audit and demonstrate compliance with strict standards on wildlife conservation can market their produce as "Certified Wildlife Friendly[®]."

Over the next few months trained auditors from AWA will assess the first group of farms. AWA will be responsible for all future third-party farm and ranch audits under the new program, and in keeping with common auditing protocols, the results will be assessed for consistency and outcome. After the initial pilot stage, the new "Certified Wildlife Friendly[®]" audit will become available to any farm or ranch at no cost when combined with an AWA audit. The "Certified Wildlife Friendly[®]" adds to the label options for sustainable high welfare farms and ranches across the U.S. and Canada.

Andrew Gunther, Program Director at Animal Welfare Approved, says,

“When I was presenting at the Wildlife Friendly meeting in Florida I realized what a great opportunity we had to grow our organization with the “Certified Wildlife Friendly ®” seal. It’s a natural fit with our organizational goals and this new seal will further demonstrate the commitment of AWA farmers and ranchers to high-welfare, sustainable farming practices.”

Abigail Breuer, Predator Friendly Program Director for the Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network says,

“AWA was the logical partner in developing our new program. AWA’s knowledge and expertise has been crucial to our developmental processes and we can finally recognize producers who maintain habitat and conserve wildlife as part of their production systems.”

Ray Victurine, Board President of Wildlife Friendly, says,

“Today’s announcement marks a crucial step in the mission of Wildlife Friendly to save ecologies by developing economies. This program helps expand the reach of our mission to now include some of the most important habitats and species across the U.S. and Canada, while at the same time improving the business opportunities for truly sustainable farms.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Since 1991, Predator Friendly has worked to encourage management practices that enable livestock farmers and ranchers to coexist with our most significant predators – and to help consumers to identify and purchase products from farmers and ranchers who are committed to coexistence with our key native predators. Starting with the certification of wool producing farms, in 2003 the program expanded to include producers of meats, eggs, honey and more. Visit www.predatorfriendly.org
2. In 2011, Predator Friendly merged with the Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network (WFEN), a global community dedicated to the development and marketing of products that conserve threatened wildlife, while contributing to the economic vitality of rural communities. Keeping true to the philosophy of Predator Friendly, WFEN has developed a set of standards that will enable farmers and ranchers in the U.S. and Canada to demonstrate key wildlife conservation practices at the farm or ranch level to the increasingly environmentally-aware public. Visit www.wildlifefriendly.org
3. Bringing its expertise in standards development and on-farm auditing to the table, Animal Welfare Approved worked in partnership with Predator Friendly and WFEN to further develop the standards and, most importantly, the appropriate third-party auditing protocols to ensure the new program was robust yet practical and achievable at the farm and ranch level.
4. Additional Contact Information:
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[Animal Welfare Approved](#) audits, certifies and supports farmers raising their animals according to the highest welfare standards, outdoors on pasture or range. Called a "badge of honor for farmers" and the "gold standard," AWA is the most highly regarded food label in North America when it comes to animal welfare, pasture-based farming, and sustainability. All AWA standards, policies and procedures are available on the AWA website, making it the most transparent certification available.

Animal Welfare Approved's [Online Directory of AWA farms, restaurants and products](#) enables the public to search for AWA farms, restaurants and products by zip code, keywords, products and type of establishment. In addition, AWA has published [Food Labeling for Dummies](#), a regularly updated guide to commonly used food claims and terms, available free for download at www.AnimalWelfareApproved.org.