

# FOOD LABELS **EXPOSED**

A definitive guide to  
common food label  
terms and claims



**A GREENER WORLD**

Our Food. Our Farms. Our Future. Let's Choose!

# FOOD LABELS EXPOSED

Modern food companies use a bewildering range of terms and claims on their packaging labels to promote food and attract buyers to their products. Common examples include locally grown, humanely raised, natural, free range, or sustainably farmed. But what exactly do all these terms and claims really mean—and how can you know they're even true?

The problem is that while some of these terms and claims have legal definitions controlled by government regulation, most are completely unregulated and can easily lead to misunderstandings—or misuse. What's more, most of the regulated label claims aren't even properly regulated or controlled. The reality is it's hard to know which food label claims you can trust—and which you should avoid.

*Food Labels Exposed* was developed to help you navigate and decipher today's food labels and restaurant menus, providing clear and factual definitions for over 100 of the most common claims and terms used for the production, marketing and labeling of meat, dairy, eggs and other farmed products. Also available as a free smartphone app, this guide will help you find out what's really going on behind the food label, allowing you to make informed food purchases.



# BEHIND THE LABEL

When it comes to food choices, one of the biggest challenges is knowing which food labels you can trust.

The label example on the right includes some of the most common terms and claims you will find on food animal product labels: fresh, natural, humanely raised, cage free, fed a vegetarian diet, no hormones added, no antibiotics added and no animal by-products.

They all sound positive. But what do these terms and claims **really** mean? We think you'll be surprised by the truth ...

## Fresh

Legally, the fresh label term (see page 16) simply means the internal temperature of a meat product must never go below 26°F. Nothing more, nothing less.

## Natural/All natural

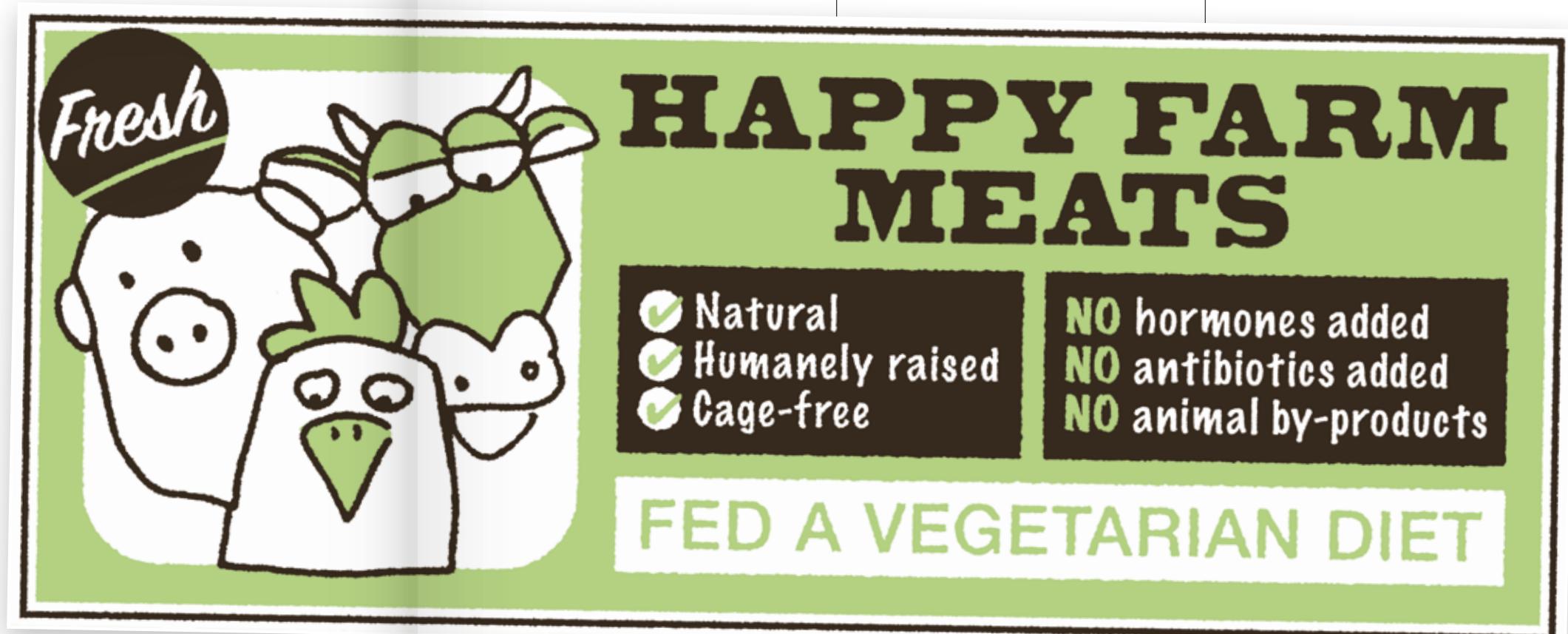
Research by Consumer Reports says 60% of consumers look for the natural label claim (see page 20) when out shopping, while almost half wrongly assume it means the animals lived outdoors on pasture. Yet this claim has absolutely nothing to do with how animals are raised, what they are fed or if they had any access to pasture, for example. It simply means the meat contains no artificial ingredients or added colors, and that it was minimally processed.

## Humanely raised

There is no legal definition or minimum agreed welfare standard for the humane claim (see page 19). So you'll find it on food products where animals were raised on dirt feedlots or indoors in confinement systems, and where antibiotic use and beak trimming or tail docking are routine practices. Unless you choose food that has independent third-party verification according to high-welfare standards, you're probably still buying industrially farmed food animal products.

## Cage free

If you see a cage free label (see page 11) on chicken meat, you might be forgiven for thinking the company is making a special concession to animal welfare by raising meat chickens without a cage. But while most laying hens are still raised in cages, broiler or meat chickens are never raised in cages. So this widely used marketing claim for chicken is actually highly misleading.



## Fed a vegetarian diet

This label claim indicates the animals were fed a diet free of animal products. However, as there is no legal definition for this claim, and farms making this claim are not independently audited, we can't know if it is true. One thing is for sure: this label claim offers absolutely no guarantees the animals were raised outdoors on pasture or range (see page 26).

## No hormones added/administered

Commonly found on poultry and pork meat labels, the no hormones added claim (see page 21) is highly misleading and deceptive. Why? Because United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations prohibit the use of artificial hormones or steroids in all chicken and pig production systems in the U.S. In other words, any chicken or pork processor could put a no hormones or steroids added claim on their label.

## No antibiotics added/administered

Some food producers now prohibit antibiotics under their labels, in response to public health concerns about antibiotic use in industrial food animal production. Even though the no antibiotics added label claim (see page 21) is regulated, most farms making this claim are not independently audited. And while some labels do have an audited 'no antibiotics ever' requirement (such as Organic), this can encourage farmers to withhold vital treatments.

## No animal by-products

This term implies no products derived from animals were used in the animal's feed. But because there is no legal definition of what an animal by-product is, a farmer could feed a variety of animal-derived ingredients—such as milk or fishmeal—under this label. And without an independent on-farm verification, no one will have audited the farm to check if this claim is even true (see page 21).

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

## Legally defined—or not?

When it comes to food choices, one of the biggest challenges is knowing which food labels you can trust. This is especially true when it comes to the growing number of ‘self-made’ label claims that don’t have any clear legal definition.

Many common label claims, such as humanely raised or sustainably farmed, fall into this dubious self-made category. This means **any** food manufacturer can use them—even if the meat, dairy or eggs come from intensive systems where animals are confined on feedlots or indoors, subjected to mutilations like beak trimming or tail docking, and given routine antibiotics and hormones.

Where a food label term or claim is legally defined or regulated, we provide the **official definition** in *italics*—citing the official source.

Where a term or claim is **not** legally defined or regulated, we provide an **unbiased definition** of the term or claim, explaining its limitations and any areas of potential concern.

## Is anyone actually checking?

Sadly, even if a food label term or claim has a legal definition, you can’t always trust it. That’s because many legally defined label claims are not independently checked or verified.

How do you know which food labels to trust? Broadly speaking, food label terms and claims fall into two key categories:

### • Audited/Third-party certified

Some of the terms and claims used on food labels are audited and verified by an independent third party. This is where an independent auditor visits the associated farm, slaughter plant or processing/packing plant to ensure food was produced or processed according to specified rules or standards.

### • Unaudited/No third-party certification

Many common terms and claims found on food labels are ‘self-made.’ In other words, there is **no** independent physical verification or audit process to check if the terms or claims used on the label are consistent—or even true.

When you are assessing any label claim, it is important to find out if it has been audited by an independent third party—or not. Unless the claim is checked by an independent third party, the integrity of a food label is often only as reliable as the individual or company making it.

## Legend

The following symbols will help you quickly identify whether a term or label claim is independently verified by audit, and whether you can believe any of the wider issue(s) the label claims to address, such as the high-welfare treatment of animals or environmental sustainability.

### AUDITED/ THIRD-PARTY CERTIFIED



The most trusted food labels in this guide will have this green **audited/third-party certified** icon. This symbol is your assurance that a term or claim made on the label is regularly verified by an independent third party, and farms and suppliers are physically audited at least once a year according to set of published standards. Audited/third-party certified labels include well-known food certifications such as Animal Welfare Approved and Certified Organic.

### PUBLISHED PROTOCOL



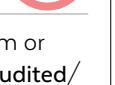
This symbol tells you the food label or claim is backed up by a legally defined or agreed definition that is publicly available. If this symbol is absent, there is **no** such definition—you might want to ask more questions about the product.

### UNAUDITED/NO THIRD-PARTY CERTIFICATION



Whenever you see a food label claim or term in this guide with this red **unaudited/no third-party certification** icon, it means there is **no** independent third-party verification or audit. When you see this symbol you should contact the supplier to find out more about the product or ask further questions to ensure you are satisfied with the validity of any claims made.

### SLAUGHTER REVIEW ASSURANCE



The welfare of animals at slaughter—including a requirement for pre-slaughter stunning for all animals—is independently verified by audit to a published set of standards.

### NO CONFINEMENT



The label makes claims that animals have access to range or pasture at all times (except when animal welfare would be adversely affected) that are independently verified. Feedlots, crates and cages are **never** used.

### HIGH WELFARE ASSURANCE



The label is widely recognized by consumer advocates as having highly meaningful animal care standards and, in addition, includes publicly available and audited standards to ensure high-welfare slaughter.

### ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCE



The label makes claims about farming’s impact on the environment that are independently verified by audit to a published set of standards.

### SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ASSURANCE



The label makes claims about the fair treatment of workers and/or communities that are independently verified by audit to a published set of standards.

### LOCAL/REGION SPECIFIC ASSURANCE



The label makes claims that the product was produced in a certain geographic region/country that are independently verified by audit.

### ANTIBIOTIC USE CONTROLLED ASSURANCE



The label makes claims that antibiotic use is prohibited or significantly restricted that are independently verified by audit.

### SLAUGHTER REVIEW CLAIM



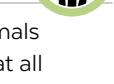
The label makes claims that antibiotic use is prohibited or significantly restricted. However, claims are **not** independently verified by audit.

### NO SLAUGHTER REVIEW



The label makes claims that may affect animal welfare. However, the welfare of animals at slaughter is **not** independently verified or audited annually to a published set of standards, or the independent verification or audit does **not** require the stunning of animals before slaughter.

### CONFINEMENT



The label makes claims about the ability of animals to roam freely on pasture or range. However, there is **no** independent verification or audit of this claim. Feedlots, crates and cages may also be used.

# TERMS AND CLAIMS

## Affidavit



Also known as a 'self-made' claim, an affidavit is defined as a statement where the individual signing takes an oath that the contents are, to the best of their knowledge, true. The affidavit system is sometimes used in meat production to support a company's claims of production methods, like the avoidance of hormones or antibiotics, specific grazing and feeding protocols, or high-welfare management. While an affidavit system may provide some comfort that label claims are factual, such systems do **not** employ independent third-party verification programs that guarantee a claim is truthful. There is no legal requirement to sign in the presence of a qualified witness, so anyone can sign their own statement. Retailers such as Walmart are moving away from self-made claims and increasingly require audits to ensure integrity and to protect brand value.

## American Grassfed Association



Definition by American Grassfed Association (AGA):

AGA's standards are based on several fundamentals:

- **Forage:** An AGA-Certified Grassfed animal is born, raised and finished on open grass pastures where perennial and annual grasses, forbs, legumes, brassicas, browse and post-harvest crop residue without grain are the sole energy sources, with the exception of mother's milk, from birth to harvest. Hay, haylage, silage, and ensilage from any of the above sources may be fed to animals while on pasture during periods of inclement weather or low forage quality.
- **Confinement:** AGA-Certified Grassfed ruminants must graze pasture where they will receive most, if not all, of their nutrition and be allowed to fulfill their natural behaviors and basic instincts of

grazing at all times. The only exceptions to this standard are emergencies that may threaten the safety and well-being of the animals or soil, and management practices such as roundups, sorting, shipping and weaning.

- **Animal Health And Welfare:** Mineral and vitamin supplements may be provided free choice to adjust the animals' nutrient intake and to correct deficiencies in the total diet energy source. The feeding of animal by-products is prohibited, and no antibiotics, ionophores or hormones of any type may be administered.
- **Origin:** Animals eligible for acceptance in the AGA Certified Grassfed program must be born and raised in the United States of America.

AGA's standards apply to ruminant animals only—beef, bison, goat, lamb and sheep. AGA-Certified producers are audited annually by independent, third parties to ensure continuing compliance with the standards.

The AGA standards ensure that animals remain on pasture and are not given any antibiotics or added hormones. However, there are no other welfare requirements and the animals could still be subject to dehorning, late castration or other painful procedures. There are also no standards to assure welfare at slaughter. AGA allows auditing to be carried out by the farm's veterinarian or extension agent, as well as by trained auditors working for certification bodies. (See also **Grassfed**.)

## American Humane Certified



Definition by American Humane Certified:

American Humane's program provides a verifiable assurance that products carrying the American Humane Certified label have met rigorous, science-based welfare standards and the animals in the program were humanely raised.

Although American Humane has recently developed a separate, optional free range and pasture standard for laying hens, there is no requirement for pasture access

for any other species in the program and American Humane also certifies caged egg production (as well as cage free indoor production). Farrowing crates are permitted under the pig standards; feedlot finishing is permitted under the beef standards; and beak trimming is permitted in both turkey and laying hen production. American Humane standards require that slaughter is reviewed annually, but there is no requirement for the stunning of all animals before slaughter. While this is a verified claim, the American Humane standards are so low that the label is not recognized as meaningful by consumer advocates.

Angus Beef, the claim is not actually a certification (rather it is a licensed trademark) and is not audited by a third-party. The terms Angus Beef and Black Angus Beef are also commonly used, but even less regulated.

## Animal Welfare Approved

aka AWA or Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW



Definition by Validus Animal Welfare Review Certification is awarded to farms that follow stringent animal welfare guidelines. Farms that receive animal welfare certification undergo a detailed assessment and audit of their on-farm animal welfare practices. Certification is awarded to farms which demonstrate compliance with the animal welfare criteria and standards established for their operation.

## Animal Welfare Review Certified

aka Animal Care Certified



Definition by Validus:

Validus Animal Welfare Review Certification is awarded to farms that follow stringent animal welfare guidelines. Farms that receive animal welfare certification undergo a detailed assessment and audit of their on-farm animal welfare practices. Certification is awarded to farms which demonstrate compliance with the animal welfare criteria and standards established for their operation.

The Validus standards are not publicly available, so there is no way of knowing what specific management practices they require. There is no information on whether animals have access to pasture or what the policy is on mutilations, calf management or antibiotic use. Although beef, dairy and pig standards exist, at the time of publication the list of certified companies appear to all be dairy farms, while the certification is displayed on products like Costco organic milk packaging.

## Antibiotic free



Statement by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

The term is not allowed to be used on a label.

Antibiotic free is not a permitted label claim. However, some companies still use this description on websites or in blogs. (See **No Antibiotics Added**.)

## Artisan/Artisanal



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

These terms imply products are handmade in small batches. They are most often used on labels and marketing materials for cheese, bread, pasta, jams, chocolates, cured meats, confections, sauces, preserves, condiments, beverages and ice cream, but can also include products from fisheries and other products. However, as there is no legal definition, anyone could use the term artisanal—even if the product is mass produced in a factory.

## Basted/Self-basted



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*Bone-in poultry products that are injected or marinated with a solution containing butter or other edible fat, broth, stock or water plus spices, flavor enhancers and other approved substances must be labeled as basted or self-basted. The maximum added weight of approximately 3% solution before processing is included in the net weight on the label. Label must include a statement identifying the total quantity and common or usual name of all ingredients in the solution, e.g., "Injected with approximately 3% of a solution of ... [list of ingredients]. Use of the terms "basted" or "self-basted" on boneless poultry products is limited to 8% of the weight of the raw poultry before processing.*

## Beyond/Better than/ More than Organic



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

These terms imply that products meet—and even exceed—organic standards. However, no verification of farming methods is either defined or audited to ensure this is the case.

## Biodynamic



Definition by Demeter-USA:

*Biodynamic agriculture goes beyond organic, envisioning the farm as a self-contained and self-sustaining organism. In an effort to keep the farm, the farmer, the consumer, and the earth healthy, farmers avoid chemical pesticides and fertilizers, utilize compost and cover crops, and set aside a minimum of 10% of their total acreage for biodiversity. The entire farm, versus a particular crop, must be certified, and farms are inspected annually. In order for a product to bear the Demeter logo it must be made with certified Biodynamic ingredients and meet strict processing standards to ensure the purest possible product.*

the SMBG, which is part of the National Zoo based in Washington, D.C. SMBG encourages the production of shade-grown coffee, and the conservation of migratory birds, through its "Bird Friendly" seal of approval.

The SMBG requires producers to meet organic standards first, as well as additional criteria to ensure they are maintaining the forest cover that provides habitat for birds and other wildlife. This label is currently only available on coffee.

## CAFO/AFO



Definition by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

*Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs) are agricultural operations where animals are kept and raised in confined situations. AFOs congregate animals, feed, manure and urine, dead animals and production operations on a small land area. Feed is brought to the animals rather than the animals grazing or otherwise seeking feed in pastures, fields or on rangeland. AFOs confine animals for at least 45 days in a 12-month period and have no grass or other vegetation in the confinement area during the normal growing season. Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) are AFOs that fall under one of the EPA's definitions of Large, Medium or Small CAFO's, depending on the number of animals involved, how wastewater and/or manure are managed, and whether the operation is "a significant contributor of pollutants." CAFOs exist in all regions of the U.S. They are concentrated in the eastern seaboard, the plains and the west coast. The total number of CAFOs is estimated to be in excess of 20,000.*

CAFOs are also known as Confined Animal Feeding Operations, Concentrated Agricultural Feeding Operations, or factory farms. The vast majority of all meat, eggs and dairy products consumed in the U.S. are from CAFO systems. If you buy meat, be aware that CAFO facilities vary widely, with huge variations in size, sanitation and welfare practices, as well as antibiotic and hormone administration and environmental measures.

## Bird Friendly



Definition by Smithsonian Migratory Bird Centre (SMBC):

*Bird Friendly is a certification created by*

## Cage free

for eggs/laying hens



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

As the term implies, hens laying eggs labeled as cage free are raised without using cages, but still almost always live inside large barns or warehouses, often with several thousand other birds. Cage free does not explain if the birds have any access to the outside, or whether any outside area provided was pasture or concrete/dirt lot, or if they were raised entirely indoors in overcrowded conditions. Beak trimming is permitted to prevent feather pecking.

## Cage free

for poultry meat



No legal or regulated definition

The cage free claim is widely used on poultry meat packaging. However, this claim is highly misleading, as meat birds are never raised in cages—no matter how intensive the system is. Poultry raised for meat under this label claim are inevitably confined indoors in enclosed barns along with tens of thousands of other birds.

## Certified farmers' market



No legal or regulated definition in many states

Some states offer or require certification of farmers' markets to ensure all products sold are produced by the farmers themselves. In 2014, these states included California, Nevada, Georgia and Texas. Most of the nation's producer-only farmers' markets establish their own rules and

The Certified Grassfed by AGW standards ensure animals are managed to high-

methods of ensuring product integrity at the local level. If in doubt, ask the market organizer.

## Certified Grassfed by AGW



Definition by A Greener World:

*Certified Grassfed by A Greener World (AGW) is an optional, additional accreditation for farmers and ranchers raising cattle, sheep, goats or bison according to Animal Welfare Approved standards of production.*

*Certified Grassfed by AGW is the only certification and logo in the U.S. and Canada that guarantees food products come from animals fed a 100% grass and forage diet, raised outdoors on pasture or range for their entire lives, and managed according to the Animal Welfare Approved program's leading welfare and environmental standards on an independent farm. While other grassfed labels exist, Certified Grassfed by AGW is the first to meet consumer expectations when it comes to a grassfed and forage diet, environmental management, the preservation of antibiotics and farm animal welfare.*

To achieve the additional Certified Grassfed by AGW requirements, ruminant animals must only be fed a grass and forage diet, with the exception of milk consumed before weaning. Animals cannot be fed grain or grain by-products. Like all other Animal Welfare Approved livestock, animals must be raised outdoors on pasture or range and cannot be confined to feedlots or dirt lots. To ensure the welfare and productivity of dairy cattle managed according to the standards, cattle dairy applicants must be Animal Welfare Approved for at least one audit cycle, have been practicing 100% grassfed feeding for at least one year, and agree to forage testing for each cut of hay, haylage, silage or baleage—whether home produced or bought-in.

Farms must additionally hold food safety certification before they can be Certified Greenhouse growers.

While this certification has some standards for environmental management, intensive greenhouse or hothouse production can involve very high-energy consumption for heating and lighting, and can result in significant greenhouse gas emissions.

welfare standards, outdoors on pasture or range, as well as being 100% grassfed for life. Because Certified Grassfed by AGW is an optional, additional accreditation for Animal Welfare Approved farmers and ranchers, the combined standards also prohibit the routine use of antibiotics and hormones and ensure welfare at slaughter. (See also Grassfed; Animal Welfare Approved.)

## Certified Greenhouse



Definition by Certified Greenhouse Farmers:

*The Standard is in support of the definition of greenhouse grown vegetables as set forth by the Certified Greenhouse Farmers (CGF):*

*A fully enclosed permanent aluminum or steel structure clad either in glass or impermeable plastic for the controlled environmental growing of certified greenhouse/hothouse vegetables using together computerized irrigation and climate control systems, including heating and ventilation capability; grown in a soilless medium that substitutes for soil (under the greenhouse/hothouse); using hydroponic methods; Integrated Pest Management and without the use of pesticides.*

Farms must additionally hold food safety certification before they can be Certified Greenhouse growers.

While this certification has some standards for environmental management, intensive greenhouse or hothouse production can involve very high-energy consumption for heating and lighting, and can result in significant greenhouse gas emissions.

## Certified Humane



Definition by Certified Humane:

*The Certified Humane Raised and Handled label assures consumers that the producer meets our standards and*

applies them to animals from birth through slaughter. Animals are never kept in cages, crates, or tie stalls. Animals must be free to do what comes naturally. For example, chickens must be able to flap their wings and dust bathe, and pigs must have space to move around and root. Animals must be fed a diet of quality feed, without animal by-products, antibiotics or growth hormones. Producers must comply with food safety and environmental regulations. Processors must comply with the American Meat Institute Standards (AMI), a slaughter standard written by Dr. Temple Grandin, a member of HFAC's Scientific Committee.

Certified Humane is a third-party accreditation that requires ruminants to have outdoor pasture access for at least part of their lives, defines space requirements and bird and animal management, and carries out audits to its published standards.

Farrowing and gestation crates for pigs and cages for laying hens are all prohibited. However, Certified Humane still receives a confinement icon as its standards permit the finishing of beef cattle in feedlots and there is no requirement for pasture access for pigs and meat poultry. Laying hens may be certified as cage free indoor, free range or pasture raised. Certified Humane also permits beak tipping of laying hens up to 10 days of age where farms have had issues with injurious feather pecking. Certified Humane standards require that slaughter is reviewed annually, but there is no requirement for the stunning of animals before slaughter.

For more information, and a comparison of the different welfare standards of various animal welfare certification programs, see [certifiedhumane.org](http://certifiedhumane.org) (select 'how we work', then 'factsheets').

## Certified Naturally Grown



No independent third-party verification

Definition by Certified Naturally Grown:

*Certified Naturally Grown is a non-profit organization offering certification tailored*

for small-scale, direct-market farmers and beekeepers using natural methods. CNG producers don't use any synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or GMO seeds, just like organic farmers. Certified Naturally Grown is an independent program not affiliated with the NOP.

Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) products are registered as having been produced in approximate accordance with National Organic Standards. CNG states that their standards on livestock management are stricter than the National Organic Standards and require more time on pasture for all animals. However, this label is modeled on a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). PGS programs differ from third-party audit models like the USDA National Organic Program (NOP), as they employ a peer-review inspection process built on local networks, rather than a formal or independent audit. There is therefore no verification by an independent third-party to ensure farms are actually meeting the standards.

## Certified Non-GMO by AGW



Definition by A Greener World:

*Certified Non-GMO by AGW is the only food label in North America that helps consumers identify genetically modified (or genetically engineered) products and support high-welfare, environmentally sustainable food animal production. Available to farmers, ranchers and food producers, the Certified Non-GMO by AGW label guarantees food products are not only produced without GMO feed, supplements or ingredients, but is the only non-GMO label to offer further assurances about animal welfare and environmental sustainability (the label is an optional addition to Animal Welfare Approved certification).*

See also Animal Welfare Approved; Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

## Chemical free



Statement by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*The term is not allowed to be used on a label.*

Chemical free and no chemicals added are not official marketing claims, as there is no standardized definition. However, some companies still use this description of their products on websites or in blogs. Such terms create confusion in the marketplace, as (for example) antibiotics are not considered chemicals by USDA.

## Cloning

aka **From cloned animals** for **meat or dairy**



No legal or regulated definition

Cloning is the practice of creating an exact genetic replica of an organism. When used in food animal production, cloning has many negative implications for animal welfare—for example, the mortality of newborn clones is very high—and potentially threatens the genetic diversity of our food supply. At present, dairy cattle are the most commonly cloned animals. Food products from cloned animals are currently allowed to enter the food system unlabeled. Some third-party certifications, such as Animal Welfare Approved, prohibit cloned animals.

## Conventional



No legal or regulated definition

The term conventional usually refers to standard agricultural practices that are widespread in the industry. It can (but does not necessarily) include the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, mono-

cropping, feedlot and confinement systems, routine/subtherapeutic use of antibiotics, added hormones and other chemical approaches and routine interventions. Conventional farming in the U.S. and Canada may also include the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), as the vast majority of feed crops, such as corn and soy, are genetically modified.

## COOL

aka **Country of Origin Labeling**



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*The Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) program is neither a food safety or traceability program but rather a consumer information program. Some food products, both imported and domestic, must meet the food safety standards of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The COOL law requires retailers to notify their customers of the country of origin for all commodities covered under this law. Foods that must be labeled with their country of origin are:*

- Muscle cuts of lamb, goat, and chicken
- Ground lamb, ground goat, and ground chicken
- Farm raised fish and shellfish
- Wild fish and shellfish
- Fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables
- Peanuts, pecans and macadamia nuts
- Ginseng

The COOL law used to apply to meat from cattle and pigs, but this part of the federal regulation was repealed in 2016. Since that time, some individual states have expressed interest in reinstating Country of Origin Labeling.

## Crate-free

for **pork**



No legal or regulated definition

Two types of crates are commonly used in intensive pork production: farrowing crates and gestation crates, defined below. It is important to note, however, that just because a label states it is farrowing-crates free does not mean it is gestation crate free, and vice versa. Even if a product is labeled crate-free, it does not mean the animals were raised outdoors.

**Farrowing crate:** A cage or other strictly enclosed space in which a sow is confined to give birth to and suckle her piglets, and where the sow's movements are restricted so she cannot turn around or otherwise have free movement. Farrowing crates are prohibited under Animal Welfare Approved, Certified Humane and Global Animal Partnership standards.

**Gestation crate:** A cage or stall in which a sow is confined for the period of pregnancy and in which she has restricted options for movement. Gestation crates are prohibited under the Animal Welfare Approved, Certified Humane and Global Animal Partnership standards.

## Dry-aged



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

Dry-aged meat (usually beef) is hung in a temperature- and humidity-controlled room for a period of weeks to develop flavor and tenderness. Under controlled temperatures the muscle fibers relax, making the meat more tender. Most commercially available meat is wet-aged, meaning it is wrapped in plastic, vacuum sealed and refrigerated for a shorter period of time.

## Dry-farmed



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

This term refers to produce grown using a technique that seeks to retain moisture in the soil and to minimize or eliminate the use of irrigation. Dry farming works to conserve soil moisture during long dry periods, primarily through a system of tillage, surface protection and the use of drought-resistant varieties. Some of the finest wines and olive oils in the world are produced with dry-farmed fruit. In addition to grapes and olives, a wide range of crops, including tomatoes, pumpkins, watermelons, cantaloupes, winter squash, garbanzos, apricots, apples and potatoes, are dry farmed in California.

## Fair Trade



Definition by the Fair World Project (FWP):

*The fair trade movement that FWP is part of shares a vision of a world in which justice and sustainable development are at the heart of trade structures and practices, both at home and abroad, so that everyone through their work*

can maintain a decent and dignified livelihood.

Fair Trade is more than just trading: it proves that greater justice in world trade is possible. It highlights the need for change in the rules and practice of conventional trade and shows how a successful business can also put people first.

Fair trade certifiers and membership organizations all agree on these basic fair trade principles:

- Long-term direct trading relationships
- Payment of fair prices and wages
- No child, forced or otherwise exploited labor
- Workplace non-discrimination, gender equity and freedom of association
- Democratic & transparent organizations
- Safe working conditions & reasonable work hours
- Investment in community development projects
- Environmental sustainability
- Traceability and transparency

A number of different fair trade certifiers and membership organizations now exist. Certifiers require an audit before allowing the use of a Fair Trade label; membership organizations, however, only screen submitted information and may not carry out audits. Food Justice Certified and Fairtrade International are examples of certified programs. For more information on Fair Trade certification and membership programs, visit the Fair World Project website at [fairworldproject.org](http://fairworldproject.org)

## Family farmed

aka Family farm or Family farming



No legal or regulated definition

Generally refers to any farm where the majority of the business is owned by the operator and/or individuals related to the operator by blood or marriage, including relatives who do not reside in the operator's household. As the vast majority of farms in the U.S. and Canada are family farms, this term is not a point of difference.

There is also growing concern this label

claim is being misused by major food corporations to present a disingenuous image of the independence or sustainability of their family farm suppliers. In such cases, the family farmed claim often refers to situations where a family might own the farm, but where all day-to-day livestock husbandry practices are dictated by contracts with a major meat processor, for example. In some cases, particularly intensive poultry and pig production, the animals are also owned by the corporation—not the farmer.

The image of family farming is often assumed to suggest local, small scale and pasture-based production. However, this claim means nothing in terms of how animals are managed, that specific practices are employed to protect the environment, the size of the farm or socially responsible practices, for example.

## Farm Check



Definition by Tyson Foods:

*The Tyson Foods Farm Check animal well-being program includes third-party on-farm audits, an advisory panel of animal well-being experts from around the country, and support of research on improving animal live production.*

Although Tyson Foods' Farm Check program standards and audit protocols are not publicly available, information on Tyson's website shows the company's supply farms are permitted to confine pigs indoors in concrete pens and use farrowing and gestation crates and teeth clip and tail dock piglets under the Farm Check program. For beef cattle, the Farm Check program permits the use of feedlots, while Farm Check also permits intensive indoor meat chicken and turkey production. Tyson claims that third-party auditing will be required, but there is no information on whether this will cover every Tyson supply farm every year or a proportion of farms. As Tyson considers its contract growers to be independent from the company, Tyson may even carry out the third-party audit themselves—despite their obvious vested interest in the outcome.

## Farm fresh



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

Farm fresh is a term commonly found on egg cartons, but may also be found on other foods. It is used to give a favorable impression of the freshness of the product or sense of immediacy—for example, implying that a farmer gathered the eggs early in the morning before rushing them to the store ready for purchase. However, it actually has no meaning or legal definition, and does not address the health and welfare of the animals. Farm fresh eggs can come from caged hens in large industrial facilities.

## Farmstead cheese



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

A farmstead cheese label suggests the cheese is made on a farm using milk produced on that farm. Farmstead cheeses are usually made in relatively small batches, often by hand. However, there is no formal definition for this term and it does not address the farm's husbandry practices or ensure outdoor access for the animals producing the milk, for example.

## Feedlot/Feed yard



No legal or regulated definition

A method of fattening cattle and other ruminants where animals are removed from pasture, confined in crowded conditions (usually on a dirt lot), and fed a grain-based diet until they reach market weight. As cattle and other ruminants are not biologically equipped to digest large amounts of grain, this can lead to the proliferation of pathogenic *E. coli* bacteria in the animals'

gut (which can cause serious food poisoning outbreaks in humans), as well as other cattle health and welfare issues, such as liver lesions. Feedlot systems are criticized for the significant environmental impact associated with the mass production and storage of waste manure, and are recognized as the most resource-intensive food system. Unless you see the No Confinement logo next to a claim in this guide, there is no guarantee that feedlots are prohibited. (See also CAFO.)

## Food Alliance



Definition by Food Alliance Certified:

*Food Alliance is a nonprofit organization that certifies farms, ranches, and food processors and distributors for sustainable agricultural and facility management practices. By choosing Food Alliance Certified products, consumers and commercial food buyers support safe and fair working conditions, humane treatment of animals, and good environmental stewardship.*

The Food Alliance livestock certification program uses both fixed and scored inspection evaluation criteria. While farms must comply with all fixed criteria, a farm may become certified based on their average score in some key areas; at lower levels of the standards, indoor or feedlot production is acceptable. Although farrowing and gestation crates are prohibited for pigs as a baseline requirement, teeth clipping and tail docking piglets is permitted. In other species, beak trimming is permitted for laying hens (as long as it is carried out before birds are 10 days old) and tail docking is permitted for dairy cows. Sheep and goats can be bought from non-certified farms and their meat sold under the Food Alliance logo as long as they are on a certified farm for at least 60 days before slaughter. Consumers are encouraged to contact individual Food Alliance Certified producers about specific practices that are not included in the fixed criteria to ensure all possible areas of concern are being addressed.

## Food Justice Certified



Definition by the Agricultural Justice Project:

*The Agricultural Justice Project (AJP) works to transform the existing agricultural system. We seek empowerment, justice and fairness for all who labor from farm to retail. Central to our mission are the principles that all humans deserve respect, the freedom to live with dignity and nurture community, and share responsibility for preserving the earth's resources for future generations. We provide farms and food businesses with technical tools to improve work and trade practices from farm to retail, including extensive toolkits and templates, one-on-one technical assistance, and a stakeholder-driven certification program for high bar social justice standards—Food Justice Certification (FJC), the gold standard for labor and trade practices in North America.*

Farms of any size and type can become FJC, as long as they are either certified organic or engaged in sustainable agriculture. Third-party certifiers and worker organizations carry out the certification and inspection process for the FJC program.

## Food Miles



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

Claims about food miles relate to the distance traveled by a given food product before you consume it. Since much of the energy used in modern food production is associated with processing, packaging, transporting, storing and preparing food, many people want to reduce their carbon footprint by buying food closer to the source—in other words, food that is locally grown and minimally processed. As there is no legal definition, each food miles claim must be evaluated individually.

## Free range

aka Free roaming  
for poultry meat



No independent third-party verification

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*Producers must demonstrate to the Agency that the poultry has been allowed access to the outside for at least 51% of their lives.*

Although free range is a positive sounding term with a legal definition, consumers should be aware that the type of outdoor access provided (such as pasture or dirt lot), the size of the outdoor area, the length of time the birds are required to have outdoor access, and how this must be verified is not legally defined, and therefore varies greatly from facility to facility. This claim provides no assurance of any other high-welfare or environmental management practices, and crowding is not uncommon.

## Free range

aka Free roaming  
for any meat excluding poultry



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

As free range is not legally defined, the type of outdoor access provided (such as pasture or dirt lot), the size of the outdoor area, the length of time animals are required to have outdoor access, and how this must be verified will vary greatly from facility to facility. It might not even be true, as producers are not required to demonstrate to USDA that birds and animals have access to the outside. A free range claim also provides no assurance of any other high-welfare or environmental management practices.

## Fresh poultry



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*"Fresh" means whole poultry and cuts have never been below 26°F (the temperature at which poultry freezes). This is consistent with consumer expectations of "fresh" poultry, i.e., not hard to the touch or frozen solid.*

## Frozen poultry



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*Temperature of raw, frozen poultry is 0°F or below.*

## Fryer roaster turkey



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*Young, immature turkey usually less than 16 weeks of age, of either sex.*

## GAPs/GHPs



Definition by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS):

*Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) are voluntary audits that verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled, and stored as safely as possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards. GAP & GHP audits verify adherence to the recommendations made in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*

*and industry recognized food safety practices.*

The USDA Guide on which the audits are based only addresses microbial food safety hazards and good agricultural and management practices common to the growing, harvesting, washing, sorting, packing and transporting of most fruits and vegetables sold in an unprocessed or minimally processed (raw) form. It does not cover environmental impacts of fruit and vegetable growing—for example, the use of pesticides and issues of pesticide residue are not considered or addressed.

## Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

aka **Genetically modified (GM)** or **Genetically engineered (GE)** or **Genetically improved foods (GIFs)**



*No legal or regulated definition*

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are plants and animals whose genetic makeup has been altered to exhibit traits they would not normally or naturally have, like resistance to certain chemicals or pests, different chemical constituents, longer shelf-life or a different color. Some products are now described as Genetically Improved Foods or GIFs. In general, genes are taken (copied) from one organism that displays a desired trait and transferred into the genetic code of another organism. More recently, a technique called gene editing has been used in livestock research. Gene editing does not introduce genes from another species, but from the same species.

There are significant concerns about the environmental impact of GM crops and associated management practices, such as the increased use of environmentally damaging herbicides. As GMOs do not have to be labeled, consumers have no way of knowing whether they are eating products that contain GMO ingredients, were produced by animals fed GMO feeds or came from genetically modified animals. At the moment the only GM animal authorized for sale in the U.S. and Canada

is the AquAdvantage Salmon, which contains growth hormone genes that cause it to grow twice as fast as normal salmon. In the U.S., the authorization to market the fish is superseded by the requirement for FDA to first publish final labeling guidance to inform consumers about the GM content of food—something that could take years to resolve. Initial proposals include QR codes on packages linked to a company website, which some critics believe reduces transparency and limits information to those with access to a smartphone. Currently the only way consumers can identify non-GMO foods is through third-party certification. (See Certified Non-GMO by A Greener World, Non-GMO Project Verified and Organic.)

## Global Animal Partnership



Definition by Global Animal Partnership:

*We are a non-profit alliance of producers, retailers, animal advocates and scientists dedicated to improving farm animal welfare through the 5-Step Animal Welfare Rating. We facilitate continuous improvement in farm animal agriculture across the world through our 5-Step Animal welfare standard and third-party certification. Global Animal Partnership is committed to recognizing farmers and ranchers that exceed industry standards and strive to continuously improve animal welfare. We work to empower consumers so they can make informed purchasing decisions.*

To qualify for the GAP 5-Step Animal Welfare program, farmers only have to meet the basic requirements of the Step 1 level, which defines fully indoor production for pigs and poultry and permits feedlot finishing for cattle, sheep, goats and bison. Although GAP prohibits farrowing and gestation crates for pigs and cages for laying hens, the standards for laying hens permits beak trimming at Steps 1 to 3, and beak trimming and toe tipping are permitted for turkeys at the same Step levels. Some of the GAP standards require that animals are stunned before slaughter

as part of an audited slaughter review before the label can be used; however, this is not currently required for beef cattle and broiler chickens.

## Grainfed

aka **Supplemented** or **Finished** for **ruminants**



*No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition*

Implies animals were fed grain exclusively or as a supplement to a forage diet. Not verified and does not provide assurances about animal welfare or meat quality. (See Feedlot/Feed yard.)

## Grainfed

for **poultry**



*No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition*

Grainfed/grain-fed/grain fed implies that birds were fed a vegetarian diet without actually specifying it. (See Vegetarian fed.)

## Grass based farming



*No independent third-party verification*

Definition by USDA National Agricultural Library:

*Grass-based production relies on pasture or rangeland to supply the protein and energy requirements of livestock. Grazing and forage feeding replace high grain diets, close confinement and feedlot-finishing during most or all of an animal's lifetime. The producer focuses on pasture plant and soil management, and proper stocking density and rotational grazing.*

Consumers should be wary of any grassfed label claim not verified by a trusted third-party certification (see below). Unless accompanied by an additional certification, a grassfed label refers only to the diet: it does not indicate if cattle, sheep, goats or

bison were given antibiotics or hormones, or offer any other assurances about high-welfare. Although all grassfed label claims require official FSIS approval before use, a signed statement (affidavit) from the farmer is typically considered "sufficient documentation" for approval; FSIS do not require any on-farm verification. As FSIS only consider the feeding protocol in their label approval process, farmers or ranchers could confine cattle or sheep on dirt feed-lots for long periods outside the grass growing season, or use routine growth hormones and antibiotics, and still market products with a grassfed label claim—just as long as they fed animals cut grass or forage.

USDA/FSIS also does not restrict companies to only being 100% grassfed and will allow companies to make other diet and grassfed percentage claims based on documentation supplied with the label application—for example, "50% Grassfed, Finished on Pasture with Supplemental Grain Feeding." While manufacturers must include the percentage of grass and forage fed somewhere on the label, this allowance will add to confusion about grassfed claims and could potentially lead to feedlot beef bearing a grassfed claim.

In addition, the FSIS grassfed definition is specific to meat. Yet there are increasing numbers of dairy products (from cattle, sheep and goats) marketed as grassfed—including Grassmilk—with a clear definition of how animals are fed and managed.

Always seek independent third-party certification for absolute assurance that grassfed-labeled meat and dairy products come from animals raised on a 100% forage diet, outdoors on pasture without confinement, and without routine antibiotics or hormones.

Certified Grassfed by AGW is the only label to guarantee animals are managed to high welfare standards, outdoors on pasture or range, as well as being 100% grassfed for life. (See Certified Grassfed by AGW, American Grassfed Association Certified, PCO 100% grassfed certified.)

## Grass Fed program for small and very small producers



No independent third-party verification

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*The USDA Grass Fed Program for Small and Very Small Producers was designed to create opportunities for small-scale livestock producers who would like to have their ruminant animals certified as grass fed. This program is designed for producers who market 49 cattle or less each year or lambs produced from 99 ewes or less.*

*This program requires that ruminant animals be fed only grass and forage, with the exception of milk consumed prior to weaning. Animals certified under this program cannot be fed grain or grain by-products and must have continuous access to pasture during the growing season.*

For approval, farms must submit documents with details of their farm, their livestock and their feeding program. This application must be renewed every two years. There is no third-party audit of the farm to check the claims.

## Grass finished



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

Not to be confused with grassfed, this term implies that animals are fed grass and forage for an undefined period before slaughter (the finishing period). However, they may have been given grains and other non-forage feeds for a large part of their lives. This feeding protocol is not verified and any prohibited feedstuffs and medications are also not defined. In addition, this claim provides no assurance of any other high-welfare or environmental management practices. Seek third-party

certified claims to assure a 100% grassfed protocol, as listed under Grassfed.

## Green fed



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

This term implies a difference from grassfed and suggests animals are fed green feeds, including vegetables, grass and other forages. However, this term is not legally defined or independently verified, and is not necessarily a positive claim when it comes to environmental management, animal welfare or meat quality.

## Halal OR Zabiah Halal



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*Meat products prepared by federally inspected meat packing plants identified with labels bearing references to "Halal" or "Zabiah Halal" must be handled according to Islamic law and under Islamic authority.*

For meat to bear the Halal label, animals are often (but not always) slaughtered without being pre-stunned. Numerous organizations audit and certify for Halal practices, but definitions and standards vary according to the certifying organization. USDA Halal is not verified.

## Hen OR Tom turkey



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*The sex designation of "hen" (female) or "tom" (male) turkey is optional on the label, and is an indication of size rather than the tenderness of a turkey.*

## Heirloom



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

Heirloom crop varieties (also called farmers' varieties or traditional varieties) is a term used for unique plant varieties that are genetically distinct from the commercial varieties popularized by industrial agriculture. Heirloom varieties have been developed by farmers through years of cultivation, selection and seed saving, and passed down through generations. Most heirlooms are varieties that have been in existence for a minimum of 50 years, although there is no legal definition. This term does not refer to any specific farming practices, such as avoidance of pesticide or artificial fertilizer.

## Heritage



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

A term applied to breeds of livestock that were bred over time so they are well-adapted to local environmental conditions, can withstand local diseases or survive in challenging environmental conditions, for example. Heritage or traditional breeds generally have slow growth rates and long productive life spans outdoors, making them well-suited for grazing and pasturing. However, the term heritage on a food label does not guarantee animals were raised outdoors or any additional high-welfare management practices.

## Home grown



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

Home grown is a phrase that may be applied to meat and vegetables. However,

without third-party verification, there is no way of telling whether products were produced by the seller and, in the case of meat, whether the animals spent all of their lives on the same farm. In addition, this label claim does not guarantee animals were raised outdoors or any additional high-welfare management practices.

## Hormone free

aka No hormones



No legal or regulated definition

This phrase is not permitted for use on the labeling of beef, pork or poultry, as animal proteins contain naturally occurring hormones regardless of the production practice. (See No added hormones.)

## Humane

aka Humanely raised or High welfare



No legal or regulated definition

Buyers should be cautious about label claims of humane or high welfare treatment without independent third-party certification. A small number of credible independent third-party agencies provide certifications to farmers who raise animals in accordance with specific production practices, such as providing an environment in which the animals can engage in natural behaviors; being raised with sufficient space where they are able to lie down; having shelter and gentle handling to limit stress; and the provision of a healthy diet without antibiotic growth promoters or hormones. In addition, high-welfare labels should always include a third-party review of slaughter practices as part of their certification procedures. (See Animal Welfare Approved.)

## Humanely handled



Definition by Meyer Natural Foods:

*Meyer has created its own standardization program for the humane handling of cattle. The Program includes the highest levels of transparency, independence and integrity. The Program focuses on several additional aspects of the production process including traceability, cattle housing, environmental protection, disbudding, castration and transportation. And while Meyer Natural Foods developed the program, it is a USDA FSIS Approved Third-party Certified Process, and requires third-party validation. All producers must comply with all standards in order to be certified via the Program.*

Although Meyer standards are available to the public, they are basic and it appears that farmers only need to meet some of the standards to gain certification. Many of the standards state that farmers should do something, rather than farmers must do something. The standards also permit castration at up to 10 months of age and disbudding/dehorning at six months of age—practices that are known to result in welfare issues—as well as confinement on feedlots. Although Meyer states that third-party validation is required, it is clear from their standards that only a proportion of sites will be audited each year; the remainder will be certified by affidavit (see Affidavit).

## Inspected: USDA



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*Inspection refers to which agency oversees a slaughter facility. Both state and federally inspected plants must follow the same guidelines, but state-inspected products may not enter into interstate commerce.*

## Inspected: custom/exempt



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*Custom/exempt processing activities are exempt from daily inspection and their products may not enter into commerce.*

## Integrated pest management (IPM)



Definition by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

*The use of pest and environmental information in conjunction with available pest control technologies to prevent unacceptable levels of pest damage by the most economical means and with the least possible hazard to persons, property and the environment.*

Some certification programs and food labels include IPM as a standard that farmers must meet before certification. However, not all these programs require IPM performance to the same degree, and some programs only incorporate minimal IPM requirements. There is no specific verification program for IPM alone.

## Irradiation



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

*Food irradiation is the process of exposing food to radiant energy in order to reduce or eliminate bacteria, therefore making it more resistant to spoilage. Forms of radiant energy include: microwave and infrared radiation, which heat food during cooking; visible light or ultraviolet light, which are used to dry food or kill surface microorganisms; and ionizing*

**radiation**, which penetrates deeply into food, killing microorganisms without raising the temperature of the food significantly. Food is most often irradiated commercially to reduce the numbers of pathogenic microorganisms, to extend shelflife, or to eliminate insect pests.

Irradiation is a process of using high-energy Gamma rays, electron beams or X-rays to kill potential pathogens in food. The amount of radiation used can vary and the number of pathogens affected by irradiation can be variable. Food that has been irradiated must either include irradiated as part of the product name or be labeled with the claim, ‘treated with irradiation’ or ‘treated with radiation,’ and also display the Radura symbol. Although FDA requires labeling on whole irradiated fruits and vegetables, there is no requirement to use the treated with irradiation statement on processed foods made with irradiated ingredients or on spices.

USDA rules regarding labeling of irradiated foods are similar to the FDA's regulations, but only apply to meat and poultry. Unlike FDA, USDA requires the listing on the package of any irradiated meat ingredients in multi-ingredient products, such as sausages.

## Kosher



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

“Kosher” may be used only on the labels of meat and poultry products prepared under Rabbinical supervision.

For meat to bear the Kosher label, animals must be slaughtered without being pre-stunned and according to Kosher principles.

## Locally grown



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

This term implies food and agricultural products are produced, processed and sold within a certain region, whether defined by distance, state or regional boundaries. There is often an expectation that locally grown products will come from small scale, environmentally friendly and high-welfare systems. However, as the term is unregulated, individuals can define the locally grown claim based on their own objectives.

### MSC Marine Stewardship Council



Definition by MSC:

The MSC works with scientists, fisheries, seafood producers and brands to promote sustainable fishing and safeguard seafood supplies for the future. We set credible standards for sustainable fishing and supply chain traceability. Organizations meet these standards in order to demonstrate the sustainability of their products. The blue MSC label makes it easy for everyone to choose seafood which has been caught by fisheries which care for the environment.

MSC standards cover three core principles: The fishery must be managed sustainably, minimize environmental impact and have an effective management system. All parts of the supply chain must pass third-party audit to MSC standards before the label is used.

## Natural/All natural



No independent third-party verification

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

A product containing no artificial ingredient or added color and is only minimally processed (a process which does not fundamentally alter the raw product) may be labeled natural. The label must explain the use of the term natural

(such as: no added colorings or artificial ingredients; minimally processed).

As defined by USDA, the term natural applies only to how meat is processed after slaughter. Research by Consumer Reports reveals 60% of consumers look for the natural label when buying meat, while almost half mistakenly assume it means the animals lived outdoors on pasture where they can express natural behaviors. However, the natural claim does not refer in any way to how animals are raised, so the farming system may have involved feedlot and confinement systems, tail docking and other mutilations, or the routine use of antibiotics, for example. There is currently a campaign led by Consumers Union calling on FDA to either ban this term entirely or redefine it in a meaningful way.

## Naturally raised



Statement by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

The term is not allowed to be used on a label.

This label claim used to be regulated by FSIS, but was withdrawn in early 2016. It is now listed as an unapprovable claim and should not be used on food labels. However, some companies still use this description of their meat on websites or in blogs.

## No additives



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

No additives is a general claim that a product has not been enhanced with the addition of natural or artificial additives. USDA and FDA define and regulate additives; however, as there is no USDA definition of the specific term—or how it is used—anyone using the term may or may not be referring to this legal regulation.

## No animal by-products

aka Not fed animal by-products



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

This term implies that no products derived from animals were used in livestock feed. While the term no animal by-products might appear self-evident, there is no legal definition of what constitutes an animal by-product, so a variety of animal-derived ingredients, such as milk or fishmeal, may still be included under this label.

## No antibiotics added

aka No antibiotics administered

for red meat and poultry



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

The terms “no antibiotics added” may be used on labels for meat or poultry products if sufficient documentation is provided by the producer to the Agency demonstrating that the animals were raised without antibiotics.

Antibiotics are routinely given to intensively farmed cattle, hogs, sheep and chickens to prevent or manage diseases, and to promote growth. Although USDA is accountable for proper use of ‘no antibiotics’ label claims, no independent third-party verification system is in place.

Some labels in this guide have an audited ‘no antibiotics ever’ requirement in their standards; examples include Organic, American Grassfed Association and Global Animal Partnership. Under such programs, animals that become sick and are treated with antibiotics cannot be sold using the certification label. A ban on antibiotics might seem like a good thing. Overuse of antibiotics in farming can lead to antibiotic resistance, where medically important antibiotics become ineffective when we get sick. However, even with the best

management, animals can fall ill and need treatment. If farmers cannot sell an animal that has been treated with antibiotics under a particular label, and are forced to sell into a lower value market, they may choose to withhold treatment instead, leading to suffering or the further spread of disease. It is worth noting that farmers cannot legally slaughter an animal treated with antibiotics for a specified period, so there should be no antibiotic residue in any meat.

A ‘no antibiotics ever’ approach adopted by some certifications and food manufacturers will not stop antibiotic abuse in food animal production, and could lead to a two-tier system where some animals may have treatment withheld, while others are routinely treated. The solution is the responsible use of antibiotics on all farms, where animals are raised in conditions that minimize the risk of illness and are given treatment only when needed. Labels that work on this basis include Animal Welfare Approved and Certified Humane.

## No antibiotics added

aka No antibiotics administered

for eggs and dairy products



No independent third-party verification; No legal or regulated definition

Farmers cannot legally sell milk or eggs from dairy animals and laying birds treated with antibiotics for human consumption for a specified period, so this label claim is misleading.

## No hormones added/ administered

for pork or poultry



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

Hormones are not allowed in raising hogs or poultry. Therefore, the claim

“no hormones added” cannot be used on the labels of pork or poultry unless it is followed by a statement that says “Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones.”

Although hormones cannot be used for raising hogs or poultry, some companies still use this label claim to make it appear their products are different from others or that the company is making a special concession to animal welfare or human health. The reality is that any pork or poultry product could utilize this label claim. Although the company is legally required to include text saying “federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones,” this wording often appears in very small lettering at the bottom of the label.

## No hormones added/ administered

for beef and dairy cattle



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

The term “no hormones administered” may be approved for use on the label of beef products if sufficient documentation is provided to the Agency by the producer showing no hormones have been used in raising the animals.

Hormones are commonly used in the commercial farming of animals such as cattle to speed the growth rate or increase milk production. (In dairy cattle, see rBST/rGBH free.) Although USDA is accountable for proper use of this claim, there is no independent third-party verification system in place.

## Non-GMO Project Verified



Definition by Non-GMO Project:

The Non-GMO Project is a mission-driven non-profit organization offering a third-

party non-GMO verification program to the standard consumers expect. We are the pioneer and established market leader for GMO avoidance. We have set the industry standard for non-GMO verification since the Butterfly first appeared on store shelves in 2010.

Concerns about genetically engineered crops (or genetically modified organisms, GMOs) have led to the emergence of GMO/GE-free or non-GMO/GE label claims, such as the Non-GMO Project Verified Product program. Given the negative environmental impacts associated with GM crops, such as the significant increase in herbicide use, the objective of the program (to help consumers avoid products containing GMOs) is laudable. However, the Non-GMO Project's standards do not address any wider environmental or welfare issues associated with intensive livestock farming, for example. Without additional third-party assurance, such as Animal Welfare Approved, meat or livestock products displaying the Non-GMO Project logo would only mean any livestock feed was free from GMOs, and could therefore come from animals raised intensively indoors or finished on feedlots, with all the associated environmental and welfare issues. In addition, the Non-GMO Project's standards only apply to meat animals themselves and ignore the feed given to breeding stock that are nursing animals that will later be sold as non-GMO meat.

Certified Non-GMO by AGW is the only food label to guarantee food products are not only produced without GMO feed, supplements or ingredients, but also come from animals raised according to the highest animal welfare standards in the industry. (See Certified Non-GMO by AGW.)

## Non-GMO/GE



Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS):

The terms "genetically modified," "genetically engineered (GE)" or "bio-engineered" are generally synonymous. Labels or labeling may claim that a food or feed ingredients used in the raising of

livestock or poultry is not bioengineered when the food or feed ingredients have not been genetically modified through the use of modern biotechnology.

Because FSIS does not have the ability to independently verify negative claims for ingredients or feed, FSIS has required establishments that make these [non-GMO] claims to comply with standards established by a third-party certifying organization. FSIS currently requires that the third-party certifying organization's standards be publicly available on a web site and the label or labeling disclose the web site address of the third-party certifying organization. FSIS currently requires that the establishment demonstrate that its claims of third-party certification are truthful and not misleading.

This recent ruling by USDA/FSIS means that non-GMO claims can only be made if the product has been audited by a third-party certification body with clear and transparent non-GMO standards. This is a good thing for consumers who want to be sure the food they are buying really is non-GMO. However, the same concerns noted for the Non-GMO Project apply here: Simply certifying Non-GMO does not address any wider environmental or welfare issues associated with intensive farming. The only third-party label that currently offers a Non-GMO assurance and addresses these wider animal welfare and environmental concerns is Certified Non-GMO by AGW. (See also Certified Non-GMO by AGW and Non-GMO Project Verified.)

## No nitrates/nitrites



No legal or regulated definition

Nitrites are commonly used to preserve meat and prevent botulism food poisoning. However, some studies link the high intake of nitrites to an increased risk of stomach and pancreatic cancer. Some cured meat and bacon sold as no nitrates added may have been cured with ingredients that are still high in nitrates.

## No spray/ pesticide free



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

A no spray claim implies that no pesticides, herbicides or fungicides are used. However, unlike the legally defined term organic, this claim is not verified by an independent third-party.

## No till

aka minimum till or conservation tillage



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

A method of planting crops with little or no plowing (or other soil cultivation) to reduce soil erosion. Highly likely to involve herbicides for weed control, with the associated potential environmental impacts.

## Omega 3 enriched



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

Eggs sold as omega 3 enriched often come from hens fed a special diet of flaxseed, which is high in omega 3. Omega 3 fatty acids are good fats that scientists believe can improve the health of the heart and the brain.

Meat and dairy products from true grassfed animals and eggs from pastured hens will naturally have higher levels of omega 3 without dietary additions. However, without additional third-party assurance to verify pasture-raised production, eggs sold as omega 3 enriched are highly likely to come from industrially raised hens fed a special diet containing flaxseed.

## Organic

aka Certified organic



Definition by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS):

All products sold as "organic" must meet the USDA National Organic Program production and handling standards. Certification is mandatory for farmers selling more than \$5,000 of organic products per year, and is verified by an accredited certifying agency.

In general, organic production limits the use of chemicals, pesticides, hormones, antibiotics and other inputs. However, it does not strictly define production practices related to space per animal or outdoor access requirements that can have significant welfare implications for animals—for example, confinement feedlot areas are permitted to fatten organic beef cattle. And while slaughter plants taking organic livestock are audited for certain aspects, such as the type of cleaning products used, they are not audited for welfare practices.

For information about the National Organic Program, and use of the term organic on labels, refer to the fact sheets 'Organic Food Standards and Labels: The Facts' and 'Labeling and Marketing Information' from USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.

## Pasture raised

aka Pastured



No legal or regulated definition

Implies animals were raised outdoors on pasture. However, unless a third-party certification program defines and regulates this term, there is no way to ensure if any claim is accurate.

## PCO\* 100% Grassfed

\*Pennsylvania Certified Organic



Definition by PCO:

The PCO 100% Grassfed certification program establishes an optional additional certification scope for operations that are certified organic under the USDA National Organic Program regulations. The program standards apply to producers of ruminant livestock and to handlers of meat and dairy products derived from ruminant livestock.

PCO 100% Grassfed certification is an optional module available to farms that are also certified organic. The standards cover both meat and dairy animals. (See also Grassfed.)

## Raw



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

This term typically refers to foods, such as milk, cheeses, cider, vinegar, sauerkraut or almonds, that have not been pasteurized (heat treated) to a minimum of 145°F.

## Raw milk cheese



No independent third-party verification

Definition by Raw Milk Cheesemakers Association:

Cheese produced from milk that, prior to setting the curd, has not been heated above the temperature of the milk (104°F, 40°C) at the time of milking and that the cheese produced from that milk shall be aged for 60 days or longer at a temperature of not less than 35°F (2°C) in accordance with U.S. FDA regulations.

This claim does not give any information about how dairy animals were managed

are prime, select and choice. For veal and lamb the top three grades are prime, choice and good. These terms are only valid if they are accompanied by the USDA shield.

Quality grades serve to identify the eating characteristics of the product. They are a guide to identify the tenderness and palatability of the meat. Quality grades exist for beef, lamb, veal and mutton. Pork is not graded with USDA quality grades and although poultry may be graded A, B or C, only Grade A poultry is likely to be seen at retail level.

The grade of the meat does not provide any information on how the animal that produced it was managed. Feedlot beef is more likely to grade prime than grassfed beef because the high corn diet of feedlot finished beef leads to more fat in the meat.

and whether this was an intensive or pasture-based system.

## rBST/rBGH free



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

rBST (recombinant bovine somatotropin) and rGBH (recombinant bovine growth hormone) are hormones used to boost milk production in dairy cattle. Research suggests their use has serious welfare implications for dairy cattle and have been found to leave residues in the milk. To avoid consumption, seek third-party certifications that prohibit its use, such as Animal Welfare Approved, Certified Humane or Organic.

## Salmon Safe



Definition by Salmon Safe:

Founded by Pacific Rivers Council, Salmon-Safe is now an independent nonprofit based in Portland, Oregon. Our mission is to transform land management practices so Pacific salmon can thrive in West Coast watersheds.

Salmon-Safe works with farmers to encourage the adoption of ecologically sustainable agricultural practices that protect water quality and wildlife habitat in West Coast salmon watersheds. Operations endorsed by our independent professional certifiers are promoted with the Salmon-Safe label.

The Salmon-Safe farm certification program is focused on management practices in six primary areas: riparian area management, water use management, erosion and sediment control, integrated pest management and water quality protection, animal management, and biodiversity conservation. Our standards were developed over a two-year period with biologists, agronomists, and farmers, and have been tested in

the field since the late 1990s at more than 700 farms in Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho, and British Columbia across a variety of crops

Salmon Safe works with regional partners—including the organic certifier Oregon Tilth—to audit and certify farms, parks, golf courses and other businesses that are following their standards to protect land, water, fish and wildlife resources.

## Soy free



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

Soy has been shown to transfer through animal feed to food product. Some people wish to avoid soy for diet, allergy or other reasons.

## Special fed veal



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

The majority of veal produced in North America is special fed veal. This term applies to young beef/dairy animals fed controlled liquid diets that maintain the calf in a state of anemia, producing a pale fine-textured meat. Veal calves are unlikely to be offered any grass/forage as this can affect the color of the meat. Calves are generally slaughtered at 15-20 weeks of age. These production systems often provide limited space, with no requirement for bedding or outside access, and are generally considered as providing extremely poor animal welfare. Also referred to as Formula-Fed, Milk-Fed or Nature Fed Veal.

## Sulfite free

aka no added sulfites/contains sulfites  
for wine



Definition by The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF):

Sulfite or sulfur dioxide is commonly used as a preservative in wines, but can cause allergic reactions in some individuals.

## Stress free environment



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

The claim that animals are raised in a stress-free environment can be found on a variety of meat and poultry products. However, as there is no legal definition or requirements on how the animal is raised, intensively indoor raised pigs and poultry and feedlot beef may still carry this label.

## Sub-therapeutic

aka Non-therapeutic use of antibiotics



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

This term refers to the administration of antibiotics when animals or birds are not sick or injured, but for the purpose of promoting growth or overcoming disease challenges that are inherent in the system of farm management. For example, cattle on feedlots may be given low doses of non-therapeutic antibiotic treatments to prevent illness from liver damage due to the grain-based diet they are fed. These practices are now directly linked with the dramatic rise in life-threatening, multiple antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and the potential loss of these vital medicines for human health. (See No antibiotics added.)

A wine can make the claim "Sulfite Free" if there are no detectable sulfites, or No Added Sulfites—Contains Naturally Occurring Sulfites." However, if the total sulfites in the wine are above 10 parts per million the label must state "Contains Sulfites."

## Sulfured/Unsulfured



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

Many dried fruits are treated with sulfur to keep them from oxidizing during and after the drying process. This preserves their original color and acts as a preservative. Unsulfured fruits are often dark brown in color.

## Sustainable agriculture



No independent third-party verification

Definition by Congress in the 1990 Farm Bill:

The term sustainable agriculture means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- Satisfy human food and fiber needs.
- Enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends.
- Make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls.
- Sustain the economic viability of farm operations.
- Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

Definition by USDA Office of the Chief Economist:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is

committed to working with partners and stakeholders toward sustainability of diverse agricultural, forest and range systems. USDA seeks to balance the goals of:

- Satisfying human needs.
- Enhancing environmental quality, the resource base, and ecosystem services.
- Sustaining the economic viability of agriculture.
- Enhancing the quality of life for farmers, ranchers, forest managers, workers and society as a whole.

Sustainable farming is generally considered as farming that is socially just, high welfare, economically viable and environmentally sound. The term is, however, unregulated and not legally defined when it comes to its use on food labels, and is therefore widely used—and sometimes misused—to promote food animal products. Always seek out third-party certification to ensure a product meets your expectations for sustainable production.

## Transitional



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

While some certifiers are beginning to offer transitional certification, transitional is typically an unofficial term implying that a farm is in the process of moving towards organic certification, and is sometimes used on products produced by farms in transition to organic certification. Farmers must practice organic methods for three years on a given area of land before the products harvested from that land can be sold or labeled as certified organic.

## United Egg Producers certified



Definition by United Egg Producers (UEP):

Ensuring the health and well-being of hens is a top priority for U.S. egg farmers, while providing safe, high-quality eggs to you and your family. To ensure egg safety and the highest quality care to hens, the United Egg Producers developed UEP Certified, a voluntary animal well-being program. When you purchase eggs with the UEP Certified seal, rest assured eggs are produced under these guidelines:

- Strict biosecurity measures protect food safety and hen health.
- All employees are trained to treat birds with care at all times, and all sign a code of conduct for proper animal handling.
- An annual compliance audit is conducted by independent third-party inspectors.
- Nutritious feed (with no added hormones), clean water and fresh air are available at all times.
- Programs to induce molt through feed withdrawal are prohibited.
- Hens are provided adequate space based on scientific recommendations.
- Cage free houses include space for nests and perches.

As 87.5% of all hens in the U.S. are kept in cages, the UEP Certified logo is widely found on egg cartons from caged systems. While UEP states their program provides hens with "adequate space," the actual amount required per bird is between 67 and 86 square inches—or less than a sheet of letter paper per bird. The UEP program also permits beak trimming by infrared treatment at the hatchery and by cutting the beak with a hot blade when chicks are up to 10 days old.

## USDA Process Verified Program



Definition by USDA:

The Process Verified Program (PVP) involves a comprehensive quality management system review, which allows companies to market their products using the USDA PVP shield. The PVP allows companies to develop their own marketing claims, such as a feeding claim. PVP companies are required to develop a quality manual and AMS verifies the company's

adherence to those processes through routine audits. Labels require the approval of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). For example, companies must have a quality policy, conduct internal audits, and continue to strengthen and improve their program. Because of this comprehensive quality management system, companies generally undergo fewer audits each year as compared to other AMS programs. Specific examples of programs verified by USDA PVP are: Source verification of animals; genetic traceability; never fed or given hormones, antibiotics, or animal protein in feeds; animal raising claims; feeding claims

The USDA PVP is a review and audit service carried out by USDA officials, designed to verify whether a company is meeting their own stated production protocols, rather than an independent definition of a particular food label claim. The USDA PVP logo offers no guarantee of high-welfare or sustainable production practices, for example; it simply verifies a food product is being produced according to the standards a company has committed themselves to meet. Although site audits form part of the USDA PVP accreditation process, in most cases a sample of sites involved in production are reviewed—not all the sites that might supply product.

## Vegan

aka Certified vegan



No independent third-party verification

Definition by Vegan Awareness Foundation:

Vegan Awareness Foundation requires that products approved to carry the Certified Vegan Logo must:

- Not contain meat, fish, fowl, animal by-products (including silk or dyes from insects), eggs or egg products, milk or milk products, honey or honey bee products
- Involve no animal testing of ingredients or finished product by supplier, producer, manufacturer or independent party
- Provide supplier verification that animal products were not used in the

manufacturing of ingredients

- Contain no known animal-derived GMOs or genes used to manufacture ingredients or finished products

Not all vegan foods use the Certified Vegan claim or logo; and even if the logo is used, the program is based on written submissions from the company wanting to display it—not audits.

## Vegetarian-fed

aka Fed a vegetarian diet



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

This claim suggests animals are fed a diet free of animal products. It does not mean animals were raised outdoors on pasture or were fed a 100% grassfed diet, for example.

## Vine-ripened

aka Tree-ripened



No independent third-party verification;  
No legal or regulated definition

Fruit that has been allowed to ripen on the vine or tree. Many fruits that are shipped long distances are picked while still unripe and firm, and later treated with ethylene gas at the point of distribution to ripen and soften them. This term does not mean the fruit is pesticide-free, organic, non-GMO, sustainable or family farmed.

Download the  
**FOOD LABELS EXPOSED** app





# A GREENER WORLD

Our Food. Our Farms. Our Future. Let's Choose!

With so much negativity around food and farming today, A Greener World serves as a beacon of positive change. We exist to promote and support real-life farming models to the public and to offer practical guidance on achieving truly sustainable livestock farming systems to farmers.

We believe the way we farm, the nutritional quality of the meat, milk and eggs produced, and the impact of farming systems on wildlife, the environment and wider society are all connected. Our goal is to offer a ‘one-stop shop’ for anyone interested in food, farming and sustainability, providing simple solutions based on your own personal concerns. We’re proud of our reputation among consumer groups, farmers and the wider food industry as a pragmatic organization driven by practical science and common sense.

Our growing family of trusted certifications includes Animal Welfare Approved, Certified Grassfed by AGW and Certified Non-GMO by AGW. Each program is designed to have positive and measurable impacts on the environment, society and animals, and to encourage truly sustainable farming practices. AGW’s standards and procedures are robust, transparent and achievable.

## **A Greener World**

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