

DEMYSTIFYING FOOD LABELS

6 Most Commonly Misunderstood Food Labels

1. Cage-free, Pasture-raised or Free-range
2. Certified Organic
3. Natural
4. Grass-fed
5. Hormone-free (rBGH-free, rBST-free)
6. Antibiotic-free

Cage-free, Free-range, or Pasture-raised

"Cage-free" means the birds are raised without cages, but it tells you nothing about their living conditions.

"Free-range" labels are regulated by the USDA only for poultry produced for meat- meaning the free-range sticker slapped on your carton of eggs means absolutely nothing. Nor are the requirements very high; in fact, the label can be used as long as the animal has some access to the outdoors each day- if even for a few minutes. It does not assure that the animal ever actually went outdoors to roam freely.

"Pasture-raised" or "pastured" requires that the animals spent at least some time outdoors on pasture, feeding on grass or forage. This traditional farming method is not generally as cost-effective (therefore raising the price of your eggs and poultry) and is typically done on a smaller scale than conventional factory-farmed animals. However, there are no government standards for this label, including how much of its life the animal spent on pasture.



Certified Organic

Organic meat is a good place to start considering routine antibiotic use is prohibited. However, keep in mind that an organic label tells us nothing about animal welfare or additional "natural" additives such as sugar or MSG. So it doesn't necessarily ensure that you're practicing conscious carnivorousism.

USDA Certified Organic Standards

- Organic crops prohibit the use of synthetic fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, or sewage sludge.
- Organic crops cannot be genetically engineered or irradiated.
- Animals must eat only organically grown feed (without animal byproducts) and can't be treated with synthetic hormones or antibiotics.
- Animals must have access to the outdoors, and ruminants (hoofed animals, including cows) must have access to pasture.
- Animals cannot be cloned.

Natural

The label natural is really more of a marketing ploy than anything else. According to the USDA, "natural" meat and poultry products cannot contain artificial colors or flavors, preservatives, or other artificial ingredients. However, this label fails to mention how the animals were raised, what they were fed, if antibiotics or hormones were used, or other aspects of production that consumers might logically expect from something labeled "natural."



Grass-fed

"Grass-fed" means, after weaning, an animal's primary source of food comes from grass or forage, not from grains such as corn.

For the record cows, goats, lamb, and bison are all designed to eat grass, not corn.

"Grass-fed" does not tell you if antibiotics or hormones were used on the animal or what conditions it lived in.

Hormone-free

The labels, "raised without added hormones," "no hormones administered" or "no synthetic hormones" all mean that the animal received no synthetic hormones. Hormone-free labels do not disclose what the animals were fed or if they had access to pasture.

Federal law prohibits the use of hormones on pigs and poultry. Any hormone-free label on pork and poultry products is intended to mislead the shopper into paying more.

Federal regulations do permit the use of hormones in beef and dairy cattle. The bovine growth hormone commonly referred to as rBGH or rBST is a synthetic growth hormone often injected into dairy cattle to increase milk production. Several hormones are used in the majority of commercial cattle farms to speed up growth.



Antibiotic-free

"Raised without antibiotics" or "no antibiotics administered" means that the animal received no antibiotics over its lifetime. Often commercial farmers administer low doses to their animals in order to promote growth and prevent disease. Keep in mind these antibiotics are linked to the spread of harmful, antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

BEST Choice Food Labels

Certified Humane

Certified Humane is an even better choice than organic. Certified Humane ensures continuous outdoor access for ruminants. Although, outdoor access is not required for birds and pigs unless the words "free-range" or "pasture" also appear on the packages. What's more, Certified Humane prohibits cage confinement, hormones, and subtherapeutic antibiotics. Certified Humane represents a significant improvement over conventional standards.

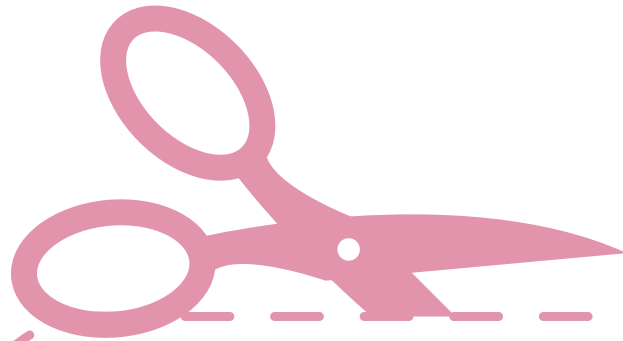
Animal Welfare Approved

Currently, the "Animal Welfare Approved" label is as good as it gets. Under this seal, animals are ensured continuous access to pasture or range, which means, there are no feedlots. What's more, Animal Welfare Approved prohibits cage confinement, hormones, and subtherapeutic (preventative or growth-promoting) antibiotics. Even better, these standards extend to breeding animals, transport, and slaughter. And just to be sure the farm is in compliance, every Animal Welfare Approved farm is subject to audit.



MSC Seafood Label

When it comes to seafood, currently the MSC label is the best we can do. Fish and seafood carrying the MSC label guarantees that the product is wild, traceable, and sustainable: meaning the blue fish label is only applied to wild fish or seafood from fisheries that have been certified to the MSC Fisheries Standard, a science-based set of requirements for sustainable fishing.



Mini Cheat Sheet

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| BEEF | Reach for grass-fed options without hormones or antibiotics. Certified Humane or Animal Welfare Approved labels ensure best quality. |
| POULTRY + EGGS | Choose Organic, pasture-raised poultry and eggs. Animal Welfare Approved and Certified Humane ensure the animal was pasture raised. |
| PORK | Reach for antibiotic and nitrate-free varieties. Don't pay more for "hormone-free" labels. Organic, Animal Welfare Approved and Certified Humane all prohibit the use of antibiotics. |
| SEAFOOD | Support sustainably sourced, preferably wild-caught or those bearing the MSC Certification. |
| DAIRY | Choose organic, whole milk from grass-fed dairy cows raised without the use of antibiotics or growth hormones. Raw dairy is your best choice. |

