

# Food Labeling for Dummies

A definitive guide to common food label terms and claims

Animal Welfare



**T**oday, a bewildering range of terms and claims are used to promote and label the food we buy. While some of these terms and claims have definitions that are controlled by government regulation, most are unregulated and are widely used by companies to attract buyers to their products. The problem is that the use of such unregulated terms can lead to potential misunderstandings – and misuse. Common examples of labels you might see on food include 'locally grown', 'natural', 'free-range', or even 'fresh'. But what exactly do all these terms and claims really mean – and how can you be confident that they are true?

Animal Welfare Approved has produced *Food Labeling for Dummies* to provide clear and factual definitions for the most commonly used claims and terms for the production, marketing and labeling of meat, dairy, eggs and other farmed products.

## How can the *Food Labeling for Dummies* help?

Let's consider a package of meat labeled "All natural Angus beef." Looking at this label, you might assume that this cow has spent every day of her life on lush grass in beautiful countryside. But the reality is that from six months of age it lived on a feedlot, where it was routinely treated with antibiotics. It never saw another blade of grass for the remainder of its life and was fed a grain-based diet in a feedlot until the day it was slaughtered. To top it all, the cow actually had no real Angus heritage in the first place – she simply had a predominantly black hide, which is all that was needed to qualify the farmer to use this term. In fact, the only true word in the "All natural Angus beef" label is that it was beef. This kind of misleading labeling is not only legal, but widely used.

Another challenge in trusting many common labels is the lack of accountability in so-called 'self-made' claims. Without independent third-party verification the integrity of a label claim is only as reliable as the person or company making it. The most trusted labels will always incorporate independent

audits of the supply chain to verify a set of published standards in order to provide maximum integrity of any claims made.

## How to use this guide

Where the use of a term or claim is legally defined or regulated, we provide the official definition in **bold type** – citing the official source. Where a term or claim is not regulated or legally defined, this fact is clearly stated and we provide an unbiased definition of the term or claim. Broadly speaking, the terms and claims made on food labels fall into two categories:

### Verified or certified by an independent audit

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

### Food labels with 'self-made' claims

Other terms and claims used on food labels are submitted and approved using a 'self-declaration' process. In other words, there is no physical verification or independent audit process to check that the terms or claims used on the label are accurate – or even true.

Within these two categories of label it is common to see a range of claims or terms relating to the farming practices used, such as the avoidance of antibiotics or hormones, or specific environmental practices, or the humane treatment of the animals. When evaluating the validity of any claim it is important to take into account whether it has been independently verified or not. If there is no independent third party verification, you may wish to request further information from the supplier to ensure that the product really does meet your expectations.

# legend

We have allocated a range of symbols for each commonly used claim or phrase to show if it is independently verified or not, and to highlight the authenticity of any wider issue(s) that the label claims address, such as the humane treatment of animals or environmental protection.

## **AUDITED/THIRD-PARTY CERTIFIED**

This symbol is your assurance that terms or claims made on the label have been verified regularly by a third party and determined to be true. This would include third-party certifications such as Animal Welfare Approved, Certified Organic and American Grassfed Association.

## **UNAUDITED/NO THIRD PARTY CERTIFICATION**

This symbol shows that the terms or claims are not independently verified regularly. Where you see this symbol you may wish to contact the suppliers to find out more about the product or to ensure you are happy with the validity of any claims being made.

## **PUBLISHED PROTOCOL**

A legally defined or agreed definition exists for the term or claim.

## **HUMANE ASSURANCE**

The label is recognized by the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) as having meaningful animal care standards.

## **HUMANE CLAIM**

The label makes claims that may affect animal welfare, but these claims are not verified and/or not recognized by WSPA.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCE**

The label makes claims that address farming's impact on the environment that are independently verified.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIM**

The label makes claims that address farming's impact on the environment, but these claims are not verified.

## **FAMILY FARMED ASSURANCE**

The label makes claims that the product was raised by a family farmer that are independently verified.

## **FAMILY FARMED CLAIM**

The label makes claims that the product was raised by a family farmer, but these claims are not verified.

## **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ASSURANCE**

The label makes claims that address fair treatment to workers and community that are independently verified.

## **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY CLAIM**

The label makes claims that address fair treatment to workers and community, but these claims are not verified.

## **LOCAL/REGION SPECIFIC ASSURANCE**

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

## **LOCAL/REGION SPECIFIC CLAIM**

The label makes claims that the product was produced in a certain geographic region/country, but these claims are not verified.

## **ANTIBIOTIC USE CONTROLLED ASSURANCE**

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

## **ANTIBIOTIC USE CONTROLLED CLAIM**

The label makes claims that antibiotic use is prohibited or significantly restricted, but these claims are NOT verified by audit.

## **SLAUGHTER REVIEW ASSURANCE**

The slaughter process is independently verified or audited annually to a published set of standards.

## **NO SLAUGHTER REVIEW**

The slaughter process is not verified or audited annually to a published set of standards.

## **CAGED EGG PRODUCTION**

Caged egg production is permitted.

# terms and claims

## AFFIDAVIT

No legal or regulated definition

An affidavit is defined as a statement where the person 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 add weight to a company's claims of production methods, such as the avoidance of hormones and antibiotics, specific grazing and feeding protocols, or humane treatment. Buyers should be aware that while an affidavit system may provide some comfort that claims being made are factual, such systems do not employ independent third party verification programs that would provide absolute guarantees that the claims made are truthful. Retailers such as Wal-Mart are moving away from this kind of 'self-made' claim and are beginning to require audits to ensure integrity and to protect brand value.

## ANGUS/CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF

No legal or regulated definition

The American Angus Association has registered a definition of "Angus" beef with the USDA that requires the animal to have 50 percent Angus genetics or a predominantly (51 percent) black coat or hide. The animal must be under 30 months at slaughter and meet some additional meat quality requirements. There are no requirements relating to how the animal is raised. The terms "Angus Beef" and "Black Angus Beef" are also commonly used but are even less regulated than Certified Angus Beef.

## ANTIBIOTIC-FREE

No legal or regulated definition

See "NO ANTIBIOTICS ADMINISTERED" below.

## ARTISAN/ARTISANAL

No legal or regulated definition

The terms "artisan" and "artisanal" imply that products are hand-made in small batches. As there is no legal definition for these terms, anyone can use the term "artisanal" – even if the product is mass produced in a factory. The term is most often used on labels and marketing materials for cheese, bread, pasta, jams, chocolates, confections, sauces, preserves, condiments, beverages, and ice cream, but can also include products from fisheries and other products.

## BASTED OR SELF-BASTED

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

**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.**

## 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.**

Biodynamic farming is an approach based on the work of the Austrian philosopher, Rudolf Steiner. In addition to organic practices, such as crop rotation and composting, biodynamic farmers rely on special plant, animal and mineral preparations and the rhythmic influences of the sun, moon, planets and stars. Biodynamic® agriculture is a method of sustainable farming that regards the farm as a self-contained and self-sustaining organism. This system encourages farmers to avoid chemical pesticides and fertilizers, utilize compost and cover crops, and promote biodiversity. The Biodynamic® claim is legally defined and audited by the Demeter Association, Inc.

## 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. For more information go to [www.epa.gov/region07/water/cafo/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/region07/water/cafo/index.htm)**

CAFOs are also known as Confined Animal Feeding Operations, Concentrated Agricultural Feeding Operations, or Factory Farms. The vast majority of all animal proteins raised and consumed in the U.S. come through the CAFO system. If you buy meat you should be aware that CAFO facilities vary widely, with huge variations in size, sanitation, humane treatment practices, as well as antibiotic and hormone administration. CAFOs are prohibited under Animal Welfare Approved standards.

## CAGE-FREE

No legal or regulated definition

This term is most often applied to egg laying hens, not to poultry raised for meat. As the term implies, hens laying eggs labeled as "cage-free"

# terms and claims *(cont)*

are raised without using cages, but almost always live inside barns or warehouses. This term does not explain if the birds had any access to the outside, whether any outside area was pasture or a bare lot, or if they were raised entirely indoors in overcrowded conditions. Beak cutting is permitted. No independent third party verification.



## **CERTIFIED FARMERS' MARKET**

No legal or regulated definition in many states

Some states offer or require certification of farmers' markets to ensure that products sold are produced by the farmers themselves. In 2009, these states included California, Nevada and Texas. Most of the nation's producer-only farmers' markets establish their own rules and methods of ensuring product integrity at the local level. Ask the market organizer about the rules which apply to your nearest farmers' market.



## **CERTIFIED NATURALLY GROWN**

No legal or regulated definition

Certified Naturally Grown is a non-profit organization offering certification programs tailored for small-scale, direct-market farmers and beekeepers using natural methods. Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) products are certified as having been produced in approximate accordance with national organic standard. This term is modeled on Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS). PGS programs differ from third-party inspector models like the USDA's National Organic Program (NOP) in that they employ a peer-review inspection process built on local networks. The label is therefore not verified by an independent third party.



## **CHEMICAL-FREE**

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

**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. Such terms create confusion in the marketplace, as (for example) antibiotics are not considered chemicals by USDA.



## **CLONING/MEAT FROM CLONED ANIMALS**

No legal or regulated definition

Cloning is the practice of creating an exact genetic replica of an organism. 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. Food products from cloned animals are currently allowed to enter the food system unlabeled. Cloned animals cannot be Animal Welfare Approved.



## **CLOSED-HERD**

No legal or regulated definition

Closed-herd implies that all animals – or at the least all females – are bred from the original herd. No animals are purchased from outside breeders or other sources to incorporate into the herd or flock.



## **CONVENTIONAL**

No legal or regulated definition

Conventional 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, antibiotics, hormones and other chemical approaches. Conventional farming in the U.S. may also include the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).



**COOL** – Country of Origin Labeling  
Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

**The Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) program is neither a food safety or traceability program but rather a consumer information program. 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 beef (including veal), lamb, pork, goat, and chicken**
- **Ground beef, ground lamb, ground pork, ground goat, and ground chicken**
- **Farm raised fish and shellfish**
- **Wild fish and shellfish**
- **Perishable agricultural commodities**
- **Peanuts, pecans and macadamia nuts**
- **Ginseng**

**For more information go to [www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/COOL\\_Meat\\_and\\_Chicken/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/COOL_Meat_and_Chicken/index.asp)**



## **CRATE-FREE**

No legal or regulated definition

Two types of crates are commonly used in pork production: farrowing crates and gestation crates, defined below. It is important to note, however, that just because a label states that it is farrowing-crate free does not mean that it is gestation-crate free, and vice versa. In addition, even if a product is labeled crate-free it does not mean that 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 sows' movements are restricted so she cannot turn around or otherwise have free movement. Farrowing crates are prohibited under Animal Welfare Approved 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 standards.

  **CURED**  
Definition by US Food and Drug Administration

**Meat and poultry are cured by the addition of salt alone or in combination with one or more ingredients such as sodium nitrite, sugar, curing accelerators, and spices. These are used for partial preservation, flavoring, color enhancement, tenderizing and improving yield of meat. The process may include dry curing, immersion curing, direct addition, or injection of the curing ingredients. Curing mixtures are typically composed of salt (sodium chloride), sodium nitrite, and seasonings. Cured meat and poultry products include bacon, beef jerky, smoked turkey, sausages, corned beef, pastrami, pig's feet and corned tongues.**

 **DRY-AGED**  
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, yielding a less resilient piece of meat that is more tender. Most commercially available meat is "wet-aged," meaning it is wrapped in plastic, vacuum sealed and then refrigerated for a shorter period of time. No independent third party verification.

  **DRY-FARMED**  
No legal or regulated definition

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. The production of some of the finest wines and olive oils in the world are accomplished with dry-farmed fruit. Today, California has dry-farmed vineyards up and down the coast. 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. No independent third party verification.

   **FAIRTRADE**  
Definition by the Fairtrade Foundation

**Fairtrade is about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world. By requiring companies to pay sustainable prices (which must never fall lower than the market price), Fairtrade addresses the injustices of conventional trade, which traditionally discriminates against the poorest, weakest producers, and enables them to improve their position and have more control over their lives.**



**FAMILY FARM**  
No legal or regulated definition

Includes any farm where the majority of the business is owned by the operator and individuals related to the operator by blood or marriage, including relatives who do not reside in the operator's household. Nevertheless, this claim means nothing in terms of specific production practices, sustainability or size. Unless the claim is defined and verified by an independent third party its meaning can vary greatly.

 **FARMSTEAD CHEESE**  
No legal or regulated definition

Farmstead cheese is made on a farm from 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. No independent third party verification.

   **FEEDLOT**  
No legal or regulated definition

A method of fattening cattle and other ruminants where animals are removed from pasture, confined in crowded conditions, and fed grain 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, as well as other health and welfare issues such as liver lesions, as well as significant environmental issues. Feedlots are known to be the most environmental resource-intensive food system. Feedlots are prohibited under Animal Welfare Approved standards. 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.**

It is worth noting that the Whole Farm/Ranch inspection evaluation criteria for Food Alliance Certification allow a farm to become approved based on their 'average' score for some key areas. This means that a farm may not actually be meeting key standards and yet the farmer could still get credit for achieving the section headline.

  **FOOD MILES**  
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 the

# terms and claims (cont)

U.S. food system is used in processing, packaging, transporting, storing and preparing food, many people want to reduce their carbon footprint by buying food with fewer "miles" – in other words, food that is locally grown and minimally processed. No independent third party verification.



## FREE-RANGE/FREE-ROAMING

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (for poultry meat ONLY)

**Producers must demonstrate to the Agency that the poultry has been allowed access to the outside.**

Buyers should be aware that the type of outdoor access provided (such as pasture or dirt lot), 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. Crowding is not uncommon. No independent third party verification.



## FREE-RANGE/FREE-ROAMING

(for any species aside from poultry meat)  
No legal or regulated definition

Buyers should be aware that the type of outdoor access provided (such as pasture or dirt lot), the length of time animals are required to have outdoor access, and how this must be verified is not legally defined and therefore varies greatly from facility to facility. There is no requirement to demonstrate to the USDA that birds and animals have even had access to the outside, let alone any reference to other management practices. No independent third party verification



## FRESH POULTRY

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

**"Fresh" refers to poultry whose internal temperature has never been below 26 °F.**



## FROZEN POULTRY

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

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



## FRYER-ROASTER TURKEY

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

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



## GAPS: GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Definition by USDA

**Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) are a collection of recommended principles for on-farm production, post-harvest processing, and storage of food that reduce risks of microbial contamination.**



## GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMOs)/GENETICALLY ENGINEERED

No legal or regulated definition

GMOs are plants and animals whose genetic make-up has been altered to exhibit traits that they would not normally have, like longer shelf-life, a different color, or resistance to certain chemicals or pests. In general, genes are taken (copied) from one organism that displays the desired trait and transferred into the genetic code of another organism. There are significant concerns about the environmental impact of GM crops. Genetic modification is currently allowed in conventional farming and foods which contain GMO do not have to be labeled. The USDA also does permit the labeling of animal products from non-genetically modified animals, meaning the consumer has no way of knowing whether they are consuming products from genetically modified animals.



## GLOBAL ANIMAL PARTNERSHIP

Definition by Global Animal Partnership

**Global Animal Partnership brings together farmers, scientists, ranchers, retailers, and animal advocates with the common goal of wanting to improve the welfare of animals in agriculture.**

The Global Animal Partnership (GAP) only has standards for beef cattle, pigs and broiler chickens, with pilot standards for turkeys. To qualify for the GAP 5-Step Animal Welfare program farmers simply have to meet the basic requirements of the step 1 level. In reviewing this qualification step, the renowned animal scientist Dr. Temple Grandin stated that in most cases the standards were the same – or only marginally better – than those found in industrial farming systems.



## GRAIN-FED/GRAIN-SUPPLEMENTED/GRAIN-FINISHED (ruminants)

No legal or regulated definition

Implies animals were fed grain exclusively or as a supplement to a forage diet. Not verified and not necessarily a positive claim in terms of welfare or meat quality. See also "FEEDLOT".



## GRAIN-FED

(poultry)

Grain fed implies that birds were fed a vegetarian diet without actually specifying it. See "VEGETARIAN FED" below.



## GRASS BASED FARMING

Definition by USDA

**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.

   **GRASSFED**  
Definition by USDA

100% of the diet of grass-fed animals consists of freshly grazed pasture during the growing season and stored grasses (hay or grass silage) during the winter months or drought conditions.

This term refers only to the diet of cattle, sheep, goats, and bison. It does not indicate if an animal has been given access to pasture, or if it has been raised in a feedlot and/or given antibiotics or hormones. The USDA definition goes on to state that "if for environmental or health of the animal reasons supplementation can be used if the producer logs the type and amount." Hence, feedlot cattle could be fed harvested forage and supplements, antibiotics and synthetic hormones and still bear the USDA grassfed label. The American Grassfed Association (AGA) has an independent third party certification program available to ranchers. The AGA certified program is recognized by FSIS (the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service) and verifies a 100 percent forage diet, raised on pasture that has a minimum of 75 percent cover, no confinement, no antibiotics and no added hormones. Meat purchasers seeking truly grassfed meat should source AGA certified products.

    **GRASSFED**  
Definition by American Grassfed Association

All livestock production must be pasture/grass/forage based. Grass and forage shall be the feed source consumed for the lifetime of the ruminant animal, with the exception of milk consumed prior to weaning. The diet shall be derived solely from forage consisting of grass (annual and perennial), forbs (e.g. Legumes, Brassica), browse, or cereal grain crops in the vegetative (pre-grain) state. Animals cannot be fed grain or grain byproducts (starch and protein sources) and must have continuous access to pasture. All livestock produced under this standard must be on range, pasture, or in paddocks for their entire lives. This means that all animals must be maintained at all times on land with at least 75% forage cover or unbroken ground. AGA grassfed ruminant animals must not be confined to a pen, feedlot or other area where forages or crops are not grown during the growing season. Livestock produced under this standard may be fed hay, haylage, baleage, silage, crop residue without grain, and other roughage sources while on pasture during periods of low forage quality or inclement weather. AGA ruminant animals may not be given hormones or antibiotics.

  **HALAL AND ZABIAH HALAL**  
Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

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 label "Halal" animals are often (but not always) slaughtered without being pre-stunned. There are organizations which audit and certify for halal practices but definitions and standards vary

according to the certifying organization. USDA "halal" is not audited.

  **HEN OR TOM TURKEY**  
Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

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 legal or regulated definition

Heirloom crop varieties, also called farmers' varieties or traditional varieties, is a term used for unique plant varieties which 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. Generally speaking, heirlooms are varieties that have been in existence for a minimum of 50 years. Note, however, that this term does not refer to any specific farming practices, such as pesticide or fertilizer use. No independent third party verification.

 **HERITAGE**  
No legal or regulated definition

A term applied to breeds of livestock that were bred over time so that they are well-adapted to local environmental conditions, can withstand local diseases, or survive in harsh environmental conditions, for example. Heritage breeds generally have slow growth rates and long productive life spans outdoors, making them well-suited for grazing and pasturing. However, the term "heritage" does not guarantee animals were raised outdoors. No independent third party verification.

 **HORMONE-FREE/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" below.

  **HUMANE**  
No legal or regulated definition

Buyers should be cautious about producers making claims of humane treatment without having independent humane certifications (see "HUMANE CERTIFICATIONS" below). No independent third party verification.

**HUMANE CERTIFICATIONS**

See individual certification agencies for any legal or regulated definitions

There is no formal definition for humane. However, there are a number of credible independent third party agencies that provide certifications to farmers that raise their animals in accordance with specific production practices, such as providing an environment in which they can engage in natural behaviors; being raised with sufficient space where they are able to

# terms and claims (cont)

lie down; having shelter and gentle handling to limit stress; and the provision of ample fresh water and a healthy diet without antibiotic growth promoters or hormones. Groups that provide certification to farmers who raise their animals in accordance with specific humane production practices include:



- **American Humane Certified**

The animal welfare certification supports caged production for chickens as humane. No requirement for pasture access for any species.



- **Animal Welfare Approved (AWA)**

The "most stringent" animal welfare standards, according to the World Society for the Protection of Animals, and the only welfare certification that guarantees animals were raised outdoors on pasture from family farmers.



- **Certified Humane**

Certified Humane is a third party accreditation that has defined space requirements for the animals and rigorous auditing to its published standards.

For more information and a comparison of the different welfare standards of the various certification schemes listed above visit:  
[www.certifiedhumane.org/uploads/pdf/Comparison%20Charts/FinalCompStandardsComparison.pdf](http://www.certifiedhumane.org/uploads/pdf/Comparison%20Charts/FinalCompStandardsComparison.pdf)



- **INSPECTED (USDA, STATE, CUSTOM/EXEMPT)**

Definition by USDA

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



- **INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT (IPM)**

Definition by US EPA

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is the coordinated use of pest and environmental information with available pest control methods to prevent unacceptable levels of pest damage by the most economical means and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment.

Some programs and 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 Food Safety and Inspection Service

**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 shelf-life, 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 amount of pathogens affected by irradiation can be variable.

Food that has been irradiated must either have "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. The FDA requires labeling on whole irradiated fruits and vegetables. However, the FDA does not require the "treated with irradiation" label on processed foods made with irradiated ingredients or on spices.

The USDA's rules regarding labeling of irradiated foods are similar to the FDA's regulations, but only apply to meat and poultry. However, unlike the FDA, the USDA requires that irradiated meat ingredients in multi-ingredient products, such as sausages, must be listed in the ingredients on the package.



- **KOSHER**

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

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

For meat to bear the label "Kosher" animals must be slaughtered without being pre-stunned.



- **LOCALLY-GROWN**

No legal or regulated definition

Food and other agricultural products that are produced, processed and sold within a certain region, whether defined by distance, state border or regional boundaries. The term is, however, unregulated at the national level, meaning that individuals can define and regulate the term based on their own mission and circumstances.



- **NATURAL**

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

**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 the USDA, the term applies only to how meat from the animal is processed after it has been slaughtered. It is important to note that this commonly used term is used for meat or livestock products it does not refer in any way to how an animal was raised, so the farming system may have involved feedlot and confinement systems or the routine use of antibiotic growth promoters, for example. No third party verification.

     **NATURALLY RAISED**  
Definition by USDA

The naturally raised marketing claim standard states that livestock used for the production of meat and meat products have been raised entirely without growth promotants, antibiotics (except for ionophores used as coccidiostats for parasite control), and have never been fed animal by-products. The voluntary standard will establish the minimum requirements for those producers who choose to operate a USDA-verified program involving a naturally raised claim.

Buyers of products bearing this label should be aware that this definition does not explain if the animals were raised outdoors or confined in feedlots or cages.

 **NO ADDITIVES**  
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. The USDA and FDA define and regulate additives; however, as there is no USDA definition of the term "no additives," anyone using the term may or may not be referring to this legal regulation. No third party verification.

 **NO ANIMAL BY-PRODUCTS**  
No legal or regulated definition

For meat products this term implies that no products that derive from animals have been 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 third party verification.

   **NO ANTIBIOTICS** (red meat and poultry)  
Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

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 given to animals, such as cattle, hogs, sheep, and chickens, to prevent or manage diseases. Although the USDA is accountable for

proper use of these claims, there is no verification system in place.

  **NO HORMONES ADDED** (pork or poultry)  
Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

*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."*

  **NO HORMONES ADMINISTERED** (beef and dairy)  
Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

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 to increase milk production. (In dairy cattle, see information on "rBST and rGBH" below).

 **NO NITRATES/NITRITES**  
No legal or regulated definition

Nitrites are commonly used to preserve meat and prevent the development of botulism food poisoning. However, some studies have linked the high intake of nitrites to an increased risk of stomach and pancreatic cancer. It is worth noting that some cured meat and bacon that is sold with the label "no nitrates added" has been cured with ingredients such as celery powder which is high in nitrates.

  **NO SPRAY/PESTICIDE FREE**  
No legal or regulated definition

While a farm may not be organic, "no spray" implies that no pesticides, herbicides or fungicides have been applied. However, unlike the term organic, this claim is not verified by a third party.

  **NO-TILL/MINIMUM TILL/CONSERVATION TILLAGE**  
No legal or regulated definition

A method of reducing soil erosion by planting crops using little or no tillage (plowing or other cultivation of the soil). This technique may rely on herbicides to control weeds. No independent third party verification.

  **OMEGA 3 ENRICHED**  
No legal or regulated definition

Eggs may be sold as being "omega 3 enriched". Omega 3 fatty acids are "good fats" that can improve the health of the heart and the brain. Enriched eggs come from hens fed a special diet of flaxseed, which is high

# terms and claims (cont)

in omega 3. True grassfed meat animals and pastured hens will naturally have higher levels of omega 3 without dietary additions.

## **ON-FARM SLAUGHTER** No legal or regulated definition

The practice of slaughtering and processing animals at the farm on which they were raised. Some states allow farmers to process animals on-farm for sale to the public, although there may be limits on the number of animals that can be processed.



## **ORGANIC/CERTIFIED ORGANIC**

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service

**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 – for example, confinement areas are permitted to fatten organic beef cattle.

For information about the National Organic Program and use of the term "organic" on labels, refer to these factsheets from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service:

- Organic Food Standards and Labels: The Facts
- Labeling and Marketing Information (PDF only)

## **PASTURED/PASTURE-RAISED** No legal or regulated definition

Implies that animals were raised outdoors on pasture. However, since the term is not regulated or certified, there is no way to ensure if any claim is accurate.

## **PESTICIDE-FREE** No legal or regulated definition

Implies that no pesticide residue can be found on the crop. It does not address if pesticides, herbicides, or fungicides were applied at other points in production. No independent third party verification.

## **QUALITY GRADE AND YIELD GRADE** Definition by USDA

**The USDA primarily grades meat by the amount of marbling – or intramuscular fat – that is present. Cuts of meat with the greatest amount of fat within the grain of the meat are awarded the highest grades. Graders evaluate the amount and distribution of marbling in the**

**rib eye muscle at the cut surface after the carcass has been ribbed between the 12th and 13th ribs. The top three grades are prime, select and choice. 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, pork, lamb veal and mutton.**

A USDA factsheet on the inspection and grading of meat and poultry is available at [www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/inspection\\_%20\\_%20grading/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/inspection_%20_%20grading/index.asp)

## **RAW** No legal or regulated definition

This term 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. No independent third party verification.

## **RAW MILK CHEESE** Definition by Raw Milk Cheesemaker's 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 US FDA regulations.**

## **RBST-FREE/RBGH-FREE** No legal or regulated definition

rBST (recombinant bovine somatotropin) and rBGH (recombinant bovine growth hormone) are hormones used to boost milk production in dairy cattle and have been found to leave residue in the milk. This claim is not verified.

## **SOY-FREE** 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 legal or regulated definition

The term special fed veal applies to beef/dairy animals that are fed controlled liquid diets which maintain the calf in a state of anemia, producing a pale fine-textured meat. Veal calves are unlikely to be offered any 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.

**? SUBTHERAPEUTIC/NON-THERAPEUTIC USE OF ANTIBIOTICS**

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 try to prevent illness from liver damage due to the grain-based diet they are fed.



**SULFITE-FREE/NO ADDED SULFITES /CONTAINS SULFITES** (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. 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 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 legal or regulated definition

Sustainable farming is farming that is socially just, humane, economically viable, and environmentally sound. The term is unregulated. Sustainable agriculture was addressed by Congress in the 1990 Farm Bill. Under that law, "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; and
- enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole."

**? TRANSITIONAL**

No legal or regulated definition

"Transitional" is an unofficial term implying that the farm is in the process of moving towards organic certification, and is occasionally 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 (see "ORGANIC/CERTIFIED ORGANIC"). No independent third party verification.

**? P VEGAN/CERTIFIED VEGAN**

Definition by Vegan Action

**Foods with this label contain no animal products, such as meat, dairy, eggs, gelatin, or honey and have not been tested on animals. Not all vegan foods use the "Certified Vegan" logo. No independent third party verification even if "Certified Vegan" is displayed.**

**? VEGETARIAN-FED/FED A VEGETARIAN DIET**

No legal or regulated definition

Animals have been fed a diet free of animal products. This does not mean animals were raised outdoors on pasture or were fed a 100 percent grassfed diet. No independent third party verification.

**? VINE-RIPENED/TREE-RIPENED**

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. No independent third party verification.

**Animal Welfare**



**Animal Welfare Approved** audits, certifies and supports farmers raising their animals with the highest animal welfare standards, outdoors on pasture or range. Called a "badge of honor for farmers" and the "gold standard," AWA has come to be the most highly regarded food label when it comes to animal welfare, pasture-based farming, and sustainability. All AWA standards, policies and procedures are available on the AWA website, making it one of the most transparent certifications available.

**AWA's online directory** of farms, restaurants and products enables the public to search for AWA farms, restaurants and products by zipcode, keywords, products and type of establishment. Visit:

**[www.AnimalWelfareApproved.org/product-search](http://www.AnimalWelfareApproved.org/product-search)**

**Animal Welfare Approved**

1007 Queen Street | Alexandria | VA 22314

(800) 373-8806

[www.AnimalWelfareApproved.org](http://www.AnimalWelfareApproved.org)



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