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.

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).

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.
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 ‘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.

Is anyone actually checking?

- **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.

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.

**Legend**

- **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 CLAIM**
  - The label makes claims that the product was produced in a certain geographic region/country. However, claims are not independently verified by audit or to a set of standards.

- **ANTIBIOTIC USE CONTROLLED ASSURANCE**
  - The label makes claims that antibiotic use is prohibited or significantly restricted that are independently verified by audit.

- **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.

- **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.

- **CONFINE**
  - 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.
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 animal 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 Certified program provides a verifiable assurance that products carrying the American Humane Certified label meet 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 cage egg production (as well as cage free indoor production). Feeding standards and management practices under the pig standards; feedlot finishing is permitted under the beef standards; and beak trapping 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 Certified Angus Beef

Definition by American Humane Certified

The American Angus Association has registered a definition of Certified Angus Beef with USDA that requires the animal to have 50% Angus genetics or a predominantly (50%) black cow or sire. To qualify, animals must be under 15 months at slaughter and must meet additional meat quality requirements. However, there are no management or welfare requirements. Despite the name Certified 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

Definition by Certified Animal Welfare Approval (AWA)

Animal Welfare Approved (AWA) audits, certifies and supports independent farmers who raise their animals according to the highest welfare standards, outdoors on pasture or range. AWA has the most rigorous standards for farm animal welfare currently in use by any North American organization and is 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 program’s website, making it one of the most transparent certifications available. To accomplish the goals of the AWA program, the standards and audit process address every aspect of each species’ lifecycle needs from birth to death. AWA is the only label that requires audited high-welfare slaughter practices with pre-slaughter stunning and is also the only label that additionally requires pasture access for all animals.

Animal Welfare Review 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.

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, confectons, sauces, preserve, 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 containing...” Use of the terms “basted” or “self-basted” is either defined or audited by the Demeter Association, Inc. or the Soil Mother Bio Dynamic Centre (SMBC), which is part of the National Zoo based in Washington, D.C. SMBC encourages the production of shade-grown coffee, and the conservation of migratory birds, through its “Bird Friendly” seal of approval.

The SMBC 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.

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 plant special plant, animal and mineral preparations and the dynamic 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, and encourages farmers to avoid chemical pesticides and fertilizers, use compost and cover crops, and promote biodiversity. While Biodynamic standards on animal management require pasture access for livestock and prohibit some mutilations, such as disbudding or dehorning cattle, beak tapping poultry or routinely tail docking sheep, the standards do not cover other common livestock operations, such as castration age and methods. The Biodynamic label is legally defined and audited by the Demeter Association, Inc. and cover crops, and promote biodiversity. While Biodynamic standards on animal management require pasture access for livestock and forbid some mutilations, such as disbudding or dehorning cattle, beak tapping poultry or routinely tail docking sheep, the standards do not cover other common livestock operations, such as castration age and methods. The Biodynamic label 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 confinement. AFOs house animals such as beef, pork, and chicken in large numbers, often in the same building. AFOs can be found in the U.S. and other countries. AFOs are defined as any operation that has more than 1,000 animals and is located within 200 feet of a waterbody. AFOs are typically divided into two categories: CAFOs and AFOs. CAFOs are defined as Animal Feeding Operations with more than 1,000 animals, and AFOs are defined as all other animal feeding operations.

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 CAFOs. If you buy meat, you should 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 of ensuring product integrity at the local level. If in doubt, ask the market organizer.

Cage free

For eggs/laying hens

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

As the term implies, 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. Cage free is permitted to prevent feather pecking.

Cage free

For poultry meat

No legal or regulated definition

The cage free label is widely used on poultry meat packaging. However, this label 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 Grassfed

Certified Grassfed by AGW

Definition by A Greener World

Certified Grassfed by AGW (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, and processed and marketed according to Animal Welfare Approved standards of production. Certified Grassfed by AGW is the only certification that guarantees food products come from animals fed a 100% grass and forage diet, raised outdoors on pasture, and processed and marketed according to Animal Welfare Approved standards of production.

Certified Grassfed by A Greener World

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 standards of production.

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 greenhouses/hothouse vegetables using together cultural, 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.

The Certified Grassfed by AGW standards of production.

Certified Humane

Definition by Certified Humane

The Certified Humane Raised and Handled label assures consumers that the producer meets our standards and welfare standards, outdoors on pasture or range, as well as being 100% grassfed for at least one year. Because Certified Grassfed by AGW ensures that 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.)

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.

Bird Friendly

Definition by Smithsonian Migratory Bird Centre (SMBC)

Bird Friendly is a certification created by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Centre (SMBC), which is part of the National Zoo based in Washington, D.C. SMBC encourages the production of shade-grown coffee, and the conservation of migratory birds, through its “Bird Friendly” seal of approval.

The SMBC 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.
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 need access to water and 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 farmers 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 30 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 (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 seed, 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 formal or independent audit. There is therefore no verification by an independent third-party to ensure farms are actually meeting the standards.

**Chemical free**

No no independent third-party verification

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 on their products, and non-GMO labeling is a way to avoid chemicals.

**Certified Non-GMO by AGW**

No no independent third-party verification

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 feeds, 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)

**Cloning**

No no independent third-party verification

Cloning is the practice of creating an exact genetic replica of an organism. When used in animal food 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 unlabelled. Some third-party certifications, such as Animal Welfare Approved, prohibit cloned animals.

**Conventional**

No no independent third-party verification

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/supratherapeutic use of antibiotics, added hormones and other pharmaceuticals 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.

**Cured**

No no independent third-party verification

Definition by U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA):
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 various spices. Cured meat and poultry products include bacon, beef jerky, smoked turkey, sausages, corned beef, pastrami, pig’s feet and corned tongues.

**Dry-aged**

No no independent third-party verification

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 no independent third-party verification

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 olives 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, garlics, apricots, apples and potatoes, are dry farmed in California.

**Fair Trade**

No no independent third-party verification

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

**Family farmed**

*A 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 welfare 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.

**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 the Tyson’s website, there is no legal basis that feedlots are prohibited.

**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 permitted. In other species, beak trimming is permitted for laying hens (as long as it is carried out before chickens are 8 weeks 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 check the Food Alliance Certified Alliance producers about specific practices that are not included in the fixed criteria to ensure all possible areas of concern are being addressed.

**Food 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.

**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*

Food miles is a 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 caging is not uncommon.

**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 5% 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 caging 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 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.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

**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 S-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.

Global Animal Partnership

**Definition by Global Animal Partnership**

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

Grainfed

Grainfed/ grain-fed/ grain fed implies that the animal was fed a vegetable diet without actually specifying it. (See Vegetarian fed)

Grass fed

Grassfed/ grass-fed/ grass fed refers only to the diet: it does not indicate if cattle, sheep, goats or biocos were given antibiotics or hormones, or offer any other assurances about high- welfare. Although all grassfed labels require that animals are raised on a 100% forage diet, outdoors on pasture without confinement, and without routine anti- biotics or hormones

Grass based farming

**Definition by USDA National Agricultural Library**

Grass-based production relies on pastures 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.

It is important to note that the use of this term does not imply the production of antibiotic- free, organic, grassfeed, or any other type of food. Although all grassfed labels require that animals are raised on a 100% forage diet, outdoors on pasture without confinement, and without routine antibiotics or hormones

Grilled

Grilled/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)

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 sold 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.

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The USD...
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 59 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 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.

Green fed

No independent third-party verification
No legal or regulated definition
This term implies a difference from grass-fed and suggests animals are fed green feeds, including vegetables, grass and forage foragers. 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.

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 aka 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.)

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.

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

List of terms

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, although there are no feedlots, medications and vaccinations are 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.

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.

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: custom/exempt

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)
Custom/export processing activities are exempt from daily inspection and their products may not enter into commerce.
radiation, which penetrates deeply into food, killing microorganisms without raising the temperature of the food. Significantly, meat is 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.

USDAs 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.

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

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 when 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 no campaign led by Consumers Union calling on FDA to either ban this term entirely or redefine it in a meaningful way.

No animal by-products

Also not fed animal by-products aka No fed animal by-products

The term “no animal by-products” 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.

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 beef and dairy cattle

Definition by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS): “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, and in fact 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.

Non-GMO Project Verified

Definition by Non-GMO Project: The Non-GMO Project is a mission-driven non-profit organization offering a third-party verification of non-GMO food and agricultural products. The Non-GMO Project provides a non-GMO product certification to food manufacturers who meet the project’s criteria for GMO avoidance in their supply chains. The certification is based on a comprehensive verification process that includes on-site audits, product testing, and detailed supply chain traceability. The program is designed to help consumers make informed choices about their food by providing a clear and transparent statement that a product is free of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The certification is available for a range of products, including food, feed, and agricultural inputs. The Non-GMO Project also provides educational resources and tools to support the implementation of non-GMO practices across the food supply chain. The organization is committed to promoting transparency and reducing the reliance on genetically modified organisms in food production.
A GREENER WORLD FOOD LABELS EXPOSED

Labels or labeling may claim that a food “genetically engineered (GE)” or “bio-Inspection Service (FSIS): Definition by USDA Food Safety and Concerns about genetically engineered crops (or genetically modified organisms, or GMOs) appeared on store shelves in 2010. Verification since the Butterfly first the industry standard for non-GMO projects. There are the pioneer and established market to the standard consumers expect. We are the only party non-GMO verification program that non-GMO claims can only be made when the food or feed ingredients have no legal or regulated definition. The USDA primarily grades meat by the 13th ribs. The top three grades for beef have been ribbed between the 12th and 13th ribs. The top three grades for beef are prime, select and choice. For veal and lamb the top three grades are prime, choice and good. These terms are only valid when 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 pork may be graded A, B or C, only Grade A pork 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 com diet of feedlot finished beef leads to more fat in the meat.

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 biotechnological processes. Because FSIS does not have the ability to independently verify 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 establishments 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 independent third-party verification, No legal or regulated definition

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 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. Heat 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 certification 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 or canola.

No nitrates/nitrites

No legal or regulated definition

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

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. 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 factsheets ‘Organic Food Standards and Labels: The Facts’ and ‘Labeling and Marketing Information’ from USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. Non-GMO Project logo would only mean that non-GMO products per year, and is verified by an accredited certifying agency.
Commercial salmon farms recognize the need to achieve a balance between profit, the sustainability of the natural environment, the health of the fish, and the well-being of the workers. To maintain the quality of the fish, farms must continually improve their management, minimize the risk of infectious diseases, and monitor the health of the fish. The farms aim to promote sustainability by following environmentally friendly practices that are beneficial for both the environment and the animals. The farms also focus on producing high-quality fish, which helps maintain their reputation and keep customers loyal.

The farms utilize sustainable methods to ensure that the fish are raised in a responsible and ethical manner. These practices help to minimize the impact on the environment and maintain the health of the fish. The farms also provide good working conditions for their employees, which helps to attract and retain experienced staff. The farms also emphasize the importance of traceability and transparency in their supply chains, which helps to build trust with consumers.

The farms also engage in the development of new technologies and techniques to improve their sustainability. These include the use of alternative antibiotics, the implementation of integrated pest management, and the use of renewable energy sources. The farms work closely with researchers and scientists to identify new strategies for improving sustainability and reducing their environmental impact.

The farms are committed to working with partners and stakeholders to promote sustainability in the agriculture sector. They seek to collaborate with local communities, businesses, and organizations to develop sustainable practices that benefit the environment, the community, and the economy. The farms are also committed to promoting education and awareness about the importance of sustainability and encouraging others to join the movement towards a more sustainable future.
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

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

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

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.
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.