

# Eco-Friendly Food Label Guide

When your goal is to **Vote with Your Fork** in favor of a healthier environment, a stronger body and better treatment of animals, you have to understand what labels claims stand for and decide which are best for you.

Each label claim below is described and then rated **strong**, **moderate**, **weak** or **meaningless**, based on how well the claim is substantiated. Use this guide to determine which label claims to prioritize and which to avoid.

## Certified Organic (dairy, eggs, chicken, goose, duck, turkey, beef, bison, lamb, goat, pork)

- Standards are defined by regulations of the National Organic Program to include organic feed for the animal and that no hormones or antibiotics are administered to the animal.
- The standards don't address many animal care issues; however, they do require access to the outdoors for all animals, access to pasture for ruminants (cattle, sheep, goats) of at least 120 days/year, fresh air and sunlight, and freedom of movement.

➤ **Strong**

## No Added Hormones/No Hormones Administered (dairy, beef, bison, lamb)

- USDA does not approve "hormone free" claims as all animals produce hormones naturally.
- "No added hormones" or "no hormones administered" claims can be used if documentation is provided showing no hormones were administered during the course of the animal's lifetime.
- USDA does not routinely test for the presence of hormones so no verification system exists.

➤ **Strong**, on beef, lamb, dairy and bison



## No Antibiotics Administered/Raised without Antibiotics (all products)

- "Antibiotic free" claims are not approved because antibiotic-residue testing technology can not verify that an animal has never received antibiotics.
- USDA does allow "no antibiotics administered" and "raised without antibiotics" claims if the producer can show documentation that the animals have not received antibiotics in feed or water and document procedures for handling sick animals.
- *Since antibiotic use can be one indicator of intensive confinement, this claim has some relevance to animal welfare.*
- USDA conducts no verification of the claim.

➤ **Strong**

## Vegetarian Fed (all products)

- This claim, indicating the diet did not contain animal byproducts, has no relevance to the conditions under which the animal was raised.

➤ **Strong**

## Animal Welfare Approved (dairy, eggs, chicken, duck, turkey, beef, bison, lamb, goat, pork)

- The only USDA approved and verified third-party certification label that supports and promotes family farmers who raise their animals with the highest welfare standards, outdoors, *on pasture or range*.
- The basic premise of the program is that animals must be able to behave naturally and be in a state of physical and psychological well-being and includes *no hormones or antibiotics are used and the avoidance of GMO's*.
- The program, which is administered and funded by the non-profit Animal Welfare Institute, is offered free of charge to participating farmers.

• [www.animalwelfareapproved.org](http://www.animalwelfareapproved.org)

➤ **Strong**



## Food Alliance Certified (dairy, eggs, chicken, beef, lamb, pork)

- A non-profit sustainable agriculture certification program that supports "safe and fair working conditions, humane treatment of animals, and good environmental stewardship."
- Standards provide for access to natural light, fresh air, shelter from extremes of temperature, and adequate space and the opportunity to engage in natural behaviors and have social contact with other animals. *Hormone and antibiotic use and GMO feed are prohibited.*

• [www.foodalliance.org](http://www.foodalliance.org)

➤ **Strong**



## Certified Humane (meat, eggs, dairy, poultry)

- Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC) is a national nonprofit organization that was created to improve the lives of farm animals including all stages of the animal's life including handling and slaughter.
- The standards include that animals have ample space, shelter and gentle handling to limit stress, *the use of growth hormones and antibiotics is prohibited, and that animals must be free to move and not be confined* – cages, crates and tie stalls are prohibited.

• [www.certifiedhumane.org](http://www.certifiedhumane.org)

➤ **Strong**



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## Naturally Raised (chicken, turkey, goose, duck, beef, bison, lamb, goat, pork)

- A voluntary standard has been established for producers wishing to have this claim verified by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).
- The claim indicates the meat came from animals *who have not received antibiotics and hormones and have been fed only a vegetarian diet*.
- The definition does not require living conditions for the animals that most consumers would expect of the claim, like access to pasture or range.
- **Moderate**

## Grass Fed (dairy, beef, bison, lamb, goat)

- A voluntary standard for “grass fed” has been established for producers wishing to have this claim verified by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).
- The standard requires a lifetime diet of 100% grass and forage, including legumes and cereal grain crops but excluding grains and grain byproducts.
- Pasture access during most of the growing season is required, but confinement and the administration of hormones and antibiotics are not prohibited.
- **Moderate**

## Pastured/Pasture Raised (all products)

- Generally, “pasture raised” is used to indicate that a dairy, egg, meat, or poultry product came from animals provided with continuous access to pasture and natural vegetation for a significant portion of their lives.
- The term “significant portion of their lives” is not defined so confinement for some period of time is not ruled out.
- There is no independent verification of the claim unless the producer participates in a third party certification program, such as Animal Welfare Approved.
- **Weak**

## Free Range/Free Roaming (all products)

- There is no legal definition for these claims; the USDA allows their use on animal products if the producer submits testimonials and affidavits describing the conditions under which the animals are raised.
- USDA informally defines free range and free roaming as having “continuous free access to the outdoors for a significant portion” of the animals’ lives.
- However, it is possible that some free range chickens never step outside and leaves open the possibility that animals may be confined – indoors or outside in feedlots – for some portion of their lives.
- **Weak**

## Humanely Raised (all products)

- Not a USDA-approved term, meaning any “humanely raised” claim must be accompanied by an explanation of what is meant.
- “Humane” claims may be made by the organizations previously discussed or any other interested organization.
- USDA AMS is only verifying that the producer has met its own standards, and as such the claim may simply represent a marketing tactic with little relevance to animal welfare.
- **Weak**, unless from an organization previously listed

## Natural (meat and poultry and other foods)

- “Natural” can be used on a meat or poultry product that contains no artificial ingredients or added color and is only minimally processed.
- The label must explain the use of the term, and **does not** indicate that no hormones or antibiotics were administered unless so noted.
- “Natural” on other food items is not qualified by any organization and is a marketing ploy.
- **Weak**

## Cage Free (eggs)

- Indicates eggs came from hens who were never confined to a cage and have had unlimited access to food, water, and the freedom to roam, but usually only within the confines of a crowded barn.
- “Cage free” is typically not used on eggs from hens that have access to range or pasture.
- There is no legal definition for the term, but the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service says it verifies “cage free” claims when made by USDA-inspected egg producers.
- **Meaningless**

## Cage Free (chicken)

- Label is meaningless when used on poultry since chickens raised for meat (“broilers”) are rarely caged prior to transport to slaughter.
- **Meaningless**

## No Added Hormones/No Hormones Administered (chicken, turkey, goose, duck, pork)

- USDA prohibits the use of hormones in the production of poultry and pork
- Such a claim on pork or poultry should be considered a marketing ploy with the sole intent of misleading consumers.
- **Meaningless** on poultry and pork

## Organic Seafood

- The USDA does not regulate fish and shellfish.
- **Meaningless**

This guide was modified from the Animal Welfare Institute, for more information: <http://www.awionline.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/23162>