

ASPCA® Meat, Eggs, and Dairy Label Guide

What do they all mean?!

Below is information about common food labels as they relate to farm animal welfare. Some terms are enforced by the USDA; others are managed by private organizations.

To learn more, visit aspc.org/farmanimal

FOOD CERTIFICATIONS



Ruminants (cows, sheep and goats) have continuous access to pasture and a diet of 100% forage (no feedlots). Cage confinement, hormones and subtherapeutic (preventative or growth-promoting) antibiotics prohibited. Standards do not extend to breeding animals, transport or slaughter. Compliance verified by auditors. americangrassfed.org



Access to outdoors not required for birds, beef cattle or pigs. More space required than in conventional farms but less than other animal welfare certifications. Cages with enrichment for egg-laying hens permitted. Standards extend to breeding animals, transport and slaughter. Compliance verified by auditors. humaneheartland.org



Continuous access to pasture or range. No feedlots. Cage confinement, hormones and subtherapeutic antibiotics prohibited. Standards extend to breeding animals, transport and slaughter. Compliance verified by auditors. Represents a very significant improvement over conventional standards. animalwelfareapproved.org



Continuous outdoor access for ruminants. Cage confinement, hormones and subtherapeutic antibiotics prohibited. Outdoor access not required for birds and pigs, but minimum space allowance and bedding required for indoor environments. Feedlots permitted with better than conventional standards. Standards extend to breeding animals, transport and slaughter. Compliance verified by auditors. Represent a significant improvement over conventional standards. certifiedhumane.org



Six “step” rating program for animals raised for meat—not eggs or milk. No requirement to move up steps. **Step 1:** Cages and crates prohibited. Animals can be kept fully indoors or on feedlots with a minimum space allowance. **Step 2:** Indoor environmental enrichment required. **Step 3:** Outdoor access required but not pasture. **Step 4:** Access to pasture required. **Step 5:** Feedlots prohibited. **Step 5+:** Animals must spend entire lives on one farm. Off-site transport prohibited. Hormones and subtherapeutic antibiotics prohibited at all steps. Standards extend to transport but not breeding animals or slaughter. Compliance verified by auditors. Steps 2 and above represent a significant improvement over conventional standards. globalanimalpartnership.org



Outdoor access required but size, duration and quality not defined and widely variable. Cage confinement and hormones prohibited. Antibiotics prohibited beyond first day of life. Minimum indoor space, handling, transport, and slaughter not addressed. Compliance verified by auditors. usda.gov

FOOD LABEL DEFINITIONS

CAGE FREE



Cages prohibited but hens can be raised in enclosed, windowless sheds. Note: Chickens and turkeys raised for meat (as opposed to for eggs) are not typically caged, rendering the label meaningless on those products.

FREE-RANGE/ FREE ROAMING



On chicken and turkey products—but not eggs—indicates birds had access to outdoors, though size, duration and quality of space are undefined and vary widely. For non-poultry species, producers don't need to provide evidence to USDA of any outdoor access.

GRASS-FED



Pasture access during most of growth required, but feedlots allowed in final months. Antibiotics and hormones allowed.

HORMONE CLAIMS



Hormone use in milk and meat-producing cattle to increase production and weight is associated with welfare problems. “**No hormones added**” or “**no hormones administered**” claims are allowed if producers prove no hormones were used during animal's life. “**Hormone-free**” claims are not approved by USDA since all animals produce hormones naturally. Hormones are prohibited for use on chickens, turkeys and pigs so this label is meaningless on products from those species.

ANTIBIOTIC CLAIMS



Routine use of “subtherapeutic” antibiotics for disease prevention or growth is associated with confined, unhealthy conditions. Lack of antibiotic use can indicate a healthier overall environment but is not a guarantee of better welfare. “**Antibiotic free**” claim not allowed because antibiotic residue testing technology can't verify animal never received antibiotics. “**No antibiotics administered,**” “**no antibiotics added**” and “**raised without antibiotics**” claims allowed by USDA if producers prove antibiotics were not added/administered at any point.

Other unregulated terms

Humanely Raised, Humanely Handled, Natural/Naturally Raised, Pasture-raised

Note: Many labels above allow certain physical alterations, such as castration, branding, beak cutting, tooth grinding or clipping, tail cutting and other procedures. Pain control is sometimes but not always required. These practices, which can be painful, are usually done to reduce injuries from behavior resulting from over-crowded, stressful living conditions. To read their full standards, visit the labels' websites.

