

For ethically, sustainably raised and fed meat, seafood, and more, visit US Wellness Meats at <http://bit.ly/grasslandbeef>

Product labeling can be confusing, especially when it comes to animal protein sources. Use these guidelines to help you choose the healthiest meat, seafood, and eggs. (And if you can, ask the farmer directly how his or her animals were raised and fed!)

cage-free

There is no legal definition for this term. Hens laying eggs labeled as “cage-free” are un-caged and generally have a bit more space than battery-caged hens. But they’re generally still crammed inside barns or warehouses, are unable to exhibit their normal, natural behaviors, and generally are without any access to the outdoors. The term also says nothing of the hens’ diets, or whether they are given antibiotics or other additives. Look for pastured eggs instead.

free-range or free-roaming

The USDA has defined no “free-range” standards for eggs, and allows producers to freely label any egg as such. Typically, free-range hens are un-caged inside barns or warehouses and have some degree of outdoor access – but that doesn’t mean they ever actually see the light of day. In addition, this label alone means there are no restrictions regarding what the birds can be fed (antibiotics, animal waste products, additives, etc.), nor their environment. Look for pastured eggs instead.

grass-fed

Meat or dairy from ruminants can be labeled “grass-fed” if the animals were fed grass for a majority of their lives. However, these animals are often finished on diets of grains, corn, soy, and other factory farming byproducts, as just a few weeks on this unnatural diet fattens the animal considerably. Unfortunately, this finishing process negates many of the health-promoting properties of grass-feeding. However, eating grass makes these animals healthier for the majority of their lives, and means their living conditions were also better... which means these animals are healthier for you to eat. Look for grass-fed *and* organic on your labels.

grass-finished

Grass-finished (or 100% grass-fed) animals have been fed exclusively their mother’s milk and grasses for their entire lives. Because they’re raised solely on their natural diets (in their natural environments), these animals are the happiest and healthiest, and contain all of the health-promoting properties that make their meat a best choice. Look for grass-finished *and* organic on your labels.

natural

According to the USDA, the “natural” label can be placed on minimally processed products containing no artificial ingredient or added color. This label in no way refers to the way an animal was raised, nor the feed, antibiotics, or additives it was given. Animals in the factory farming system can still carry the label “natural.” In addition, there is no system in place to verify “natural” claims.

no added hormones

The USDA prohibits the use of added hormones in raising poultry and pork, so don’t let this label on your chicken, pork chops or eggs give you false confidence in the quality of the protein. The use of hormones in beef, however, is up to the animal’s caretaker. So, if you see this noted on your beef, this may indicate a better choice – but a certified organic label is better.

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no antibiotics

Antibiotics are given to factory-farmed animals as a matter of course, to prevent and treat various diseases. The effects of these chemicals on the humans who consume the meat and eggs has yet to be determined, so if the idea of medicated meat makes you nervous, know that it bothers us, too. This label is often abused, and not third-party certified. Look for certified organic instead.

omega-3 enriched

Hens are given feed enriched with flax seed, which adds a bit of omega-3 fatty acids to their eggs. This label says nothing about the manner in which the chickens were raised, or the quality of food they were fed. Pastured and organic are better choices.

organic

Organic certification for animal protein sources (meat and eggs) is regulated by the USDA. The organic label tells you that the animals lived un-caged in a barn or a warehouse with “access to the outside,” that they were given 100% organic feed and were never given hormones or antibiotics. The organic label indicates that some care was taken to ensure the animal was raised in a more healthful environment, but not necessarily raised and fed in a manner optimal for the animal’s welfare or health.

pastured

While there is no legal definition of “pastured,” animal products labeled as such (like pork, eggs or butter) generally come from animals who are allowed to roam in open pastures and graze as they please. They don’t just have “access to the outdoors” – they actually are outdoors for a good portion of their lives. Advocates of pastured animal products believe that the animals are happier and healthier, and nutritional analysis has shown that pastured meat, eggs and dairy products are also more nutritious. Look for pastured *and* organic on your labels.

sustainable

Seafood is considered sustainable when the species’ population is managed in a way that minimizes damage to its ability to reproduce. It’s always a good idea to choose wild-caught, sustainable seafood options..

vegetarian-fed

These chickens are given feed that doesn’t contain any animal waste products – which is a good thing. However, chickens are not vegetarians – they’re omnivores! Which means this label tells you directly that the animals were not fed their natural, species-specific diet, nor does it say anything about the manner in which they were raised.

wild-caught

Fish were caught in their natural habitat. While this speaks to the manner in which the fish lived its life, it doesn’t offer any information about the manner in which the fish was caught or the sustainability of the species. Look for wild-caught, sustainable options when selecting seafood.