

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.