

Terms verified by USDA:

Organic. Organic is a labeling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced through approved methods. These methods integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used.

Free-range. This label indicates that the flock was provided shelter in a building, room, or area with unlimited access to food, fresh water, and continuous access to the outdoors during their production cycle. The outdoor area may or may not be fenced and/or covered with netting-like material. This label is regulated by the USDA.

Cage-free. This label indicates that the flock was able to freely roam a building, room, or enclosed area with unlimited access to food and fresh water during their production cycle.

Natural. As required by USDA, meat, poultry, and egg products labeled as “natural” must be minimally processed and contain no artificial ingredients. However, the natural label does not include any standards regarding farm practices and only applies to processing of meat and egg products. There are no standards or regulations for the labeling of natural food products if they do not contain meat or eggs.

Grass-fed. Grass-fed animals receive a majority of their nutrients from grass throughout their life, while organic animals’ pasture diet may be supplemented with grain. Also USDA regulated, the grass-fed label does not limit the use of antibiotics, hormones, or pesticides. Meat products may be labeled as grass-fed organic.

Pasture-raised. Due to the number of variables involved in pasture-raised agricultural systems, the USDA has not developed a federal definition for pasture-raised products.

Humane. Multiple labeling programs make claims that animals were treated humanely during the production cycle, but the verification of these claims varies widely. These labeling programs are not regulated under a single USDA definition.

No added hormones. A similar claim includes “Raised without Hormones.” Federal regulations have never permitted hormones or steroids in poultry, pork, or goat.

Antibiotic-Free. The terms "no antibiotics added" may be used on labels for meat or poultry products if sufficient documentation is provided by the producer demonstrating that the animals were raised without antibiotics.

Naturally Raised. Livestock used for the production of meat and meat products that have been raised entirely without growth promotants, antibiotics (except for ionophores used as coccidiostats for parasite control), and have never been fed animal (mammalian, avian, or

aquatic) by-products derived from the slaughter/harvest processes, including meat and fat, animal waste materials (e.g., manure and litter), and aquatic by-products (e.g., fishmeal and fish oil). All products labeled with a naturally raised marketing claim must incorporate information explicitly stating that animals have been raised in a manner that meets the following conditions: 1) no growth promotants were administered to the animals; 2) no antibiotics (other than ionophores used to prevent parasitism) were administered to the animal; and 3) no animal by-products were fed to the animals. If ionophores used only to prevent parasitism were administered to the animals, they may be labeled with the naturally raised marketing claims if that fact is explicitly noted.

USDA Process Verified Program: The USDA Process Verified Program uses the International Organization for Standardization's ISO 9000 series standards for documented quality management systems as a format for evaluating program documentation to ensure consistent auditing practices and promote international recognition of audit results. The USDA Process Verified Program provides companies that supply agricultural products or services the opportunity to assure customers of their ability to provide consistent quality products or services. It is limited to programs or portions of programs where specified process verified points are supported by a documented quality management system. The specified process verified points are identified by the supplier. Companies with approved USDA Process Verified Programs are able to make marketing claims associated with their process verified points – these include age, source, feeding practices, or other raising and processing claims -- and market themselves as "USDA Process Verified" with use of the "USDA Process Verified" shield and term. The USDA Process Verified Program does not relieve the company of meeting regulatory requirements issued by other Federal Departments or USDA Agencies.