



Nice to Meet You!

An insight into your beef food labels and what they mean

How was the cattle processed?



*For beef to be labeled as **“Animal Welfare Approved”** the cattle must be raised on pasture or range and follow a broad set of animal welfare and environmental standards.

****USDA Organic** standard is an umbrella that often encompasses other claims as it prohibits: antibiotics, growth hormones, and genetic engineering among other practices.

(These two are the only labels listed here that are verified by the USDA and/or a third party member. The other labels may be used without a third party verification.)



All beef initially qualifies as “natural”. How the beef is processed that determines if it can be sold with a “natural” or “all natural” label. For this label, the final packaged product must not contain any artificial flavors, colors, preservatives, and artificial ingredients.



What did the cattle eat?

Should I look for Grass Finished or Grain Finished?



Most beef you find in the store is technically “grass fed”. Most cows start off grazing in pastures until they move into the final stage of growth before being processed. This is called the “finishing” stage. During this stage, some cows stay on grass and others are shipped to feed lots to be fed grain. Grass finished beef tends to be leaner and has a stronger beef flavor. If this is your flavor of choice, look for the “100% Grass Fed” or “Grass Finished” labels. Grain finished beef is richer and more mild in flavor, the absence of the Grass Fed/Finished labels will point you in the right direction to finding grain finished beef. Many cuts of both types still meet USDA guidelines for “lean”.

How did the cattle grow up?



Grown Without Antibiotics

“Raised without antibiotics” means that the cow has not received routine use or one-time use of antibiotics during its life. At this time, antibiotics are only allowed to treat illness in cows and are not allowed to help make the animal grow. Technically all beef sold is antibiotic free at the time of consumption.



No Added Hormones

Since hormones are naturally occurring, there is **no such thing as completely hormone free beef.**

Sometimes hormones are used in cattle to promote growth. The amount of hormones found in the actual beef is extremely low. Some producers do not add hormones for growth and may label their product “no added hormones”.



“Pasture Raised”

The **pasture raised** label means that the cow was free to roam and had access to pasture during its entire life.

“Sustainably Raised”

There is no set definition for what constitutes “sustainably raised” beef and there is no official verification process.

* This claim is not regulated by the USDA but producers still need third party verification through a private certification program to use this label

** To obtain this label the cows must come from a certified organic farm and be processed in a certified organic facility. Obtaining USDA organic certification involves a vigorous audit from a third party agency that verifies practices are in compliance with USDA organic protocols.