

## Food Labels

### Read Past the Basics

According to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), “organic” foods are not grown or processed with:

- Pesticides
- Man-made fertilizers
- Genetically modified organisms (GMO)
- Artificial preservatives, colors or flavors
- Growth hormones
- Antibiotics
- Irradiation



### How to know if Food is Organic

The package will have the USDA Organic seal.

©USDA

- “100% organic” – All ingredients are organic.
- “Organic” – 95% or more of the ingredients are certified organic.
- “Made with organic ingredients” – At least 70% of the ingredients are certified organic.
- “Organic ingredients” – No specific requirements; may have GMOs

### Are organic foods healthier?

Organic foods may not have more nutrients than non-organic foods. Organic foods are becoming more popular. However, they may not be available in every market and are often more expensive. The American Institute of Cancer Research (AICR) states the overall health protection from eating a well-balanced, plant based diet is more important than not eating vegetables and fruits because they are not organic. In addition, locally grown food can be a good choice as it is picked in season and travels fewer miles. This may lead to foods which hold more nutrients making them fresher.

## Vegetables and Fruits

All produce, both organic and non-organic, should be washed before eating. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommend you wash fruits and vegetables under running water. Wash just before you eat, cut or cook. A produce brush may help remove extra dirt. You can also peel vegetables and fruits. However, skins and peels have nutrients and fiber. The FDA does not recommend using soap or vegetable and fruit sprays.

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) has a list to help guide you on which produce may have more pesticides (Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce from [www.ewg.org/foodnews](http://www.ewg.org/foodnews)).

The Dirty Dozen™ is the list of produce with the highest amounts of pesticides. The Clean 15™ are those lowest in pesticides.



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## Reading Food Labels

Learn how to read food labels. This can help you make healthy and budget-friendly choices. Look for labels with an “official seal.” These products can be trusted.

## GMO Free

- GMO, or genetically modified organisms, are foods that are changed through laboratory processes into a form that does not happen in nature. Potential benefits for growers may include protection against insects, larger size, quicker growing time and resistance to disease and drought. Potential risks may include harm to the original plant, animal or the environment
- Health benefits: Research is limited.
- Currently, manufactures do not have to label foods that contain GMO. If a product has the “Non-GMO Project Verified” seal, it has been tested and found not to have GMO.



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## No Added Hormones

- This means that animals were raised without growth hormones. However, hormones may be given to cows to make more milk.
- Check the label for the words “no added hormones” on milk, butter and cheese.
- USDA certified organic milk and dairy products are hormone free.
- USDA does not allow hormones in pork and chicken.
- Health Benefits: Limited research is available at this time.
- Official seal: none

## Natural or All Natural

- There is no government regulation or rule about using the word “natural.” However, it is used to suggest a food does not have any artificial ingredients or added colors. They may have hormones and antibiotics. These foods cannot be changed too much from their original form.
- Health benefits: none at this time
- Official seal: none

## No Antibiotics

- This means animals were raised without antibiotics.
- USDA certified organic foods do not contain antibiotics.
- Health benefits: Limited research in human studies.
- Official seal: none

## Grass Fed

- Meat is from animals (beef, goat, lamb or buffalo) raised on a diet of mostly grass.
- Health benefits: Limited research on reduction of cancer.
- These meats may have less saturated fat and more healthy Omega 3 fatty acids.
- However, all red meat should be limited to less than 18oz per week to reduce the risk of cancer.
- Official seal: none

## Certified Humane

- Farm animals that are raised without animal by-products, antibiotics or hormones. They have shelter with large enough space for natural behaviors.
- Health benefits: limited research
- Official seal: The Certified Humane® seal

## Pasture Raised

- With animal welfare as a goal, animals roam naturally outside or on a grass field.
- Health benefits: limited research
- Official seal: The Certified Humane® seal may be used.

Pasture Raised is different from “pasteurized” which means to destroy the bacteria, usually through heat, such as with pasteurized milk.

## Free Range and Cage Free

- Free range chickens have limited outdoor access. But they may be raised in a crowded indoor space.
- Cage free chickens live in an indoor area but do not go outside. There are standards to feed, water, and clean these chickens.
- Health benefits: These labels do not necessarily indicate a more nutritious product.
- Official seal: The Certified Humane® seal may be used.

## Resources

### **American Institute of Cancer Research**

[www.aicr.org](http://www.aicr.org)

AICR focuses on the link between lifestyle and cancer, and supports cutting-edge research to educate the public about nutrition, physical activity and cancer prevention, treatment and survival.

### **National Organic Program**

[www.ams.usda.gov/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop)

The National Organic Program regulates the organic program for the federal government. It is a part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

### **Environmental Working Group**

<http://www.ewg.org>

1-202-667-6982

Environmental Working Group is a nonprofit organization. It supports health policies within our government and educates the public.

### **US Food and Drug Administration**

<https://www.fda.gov>

The FDA is responsible for ensuring the safety of our nation's food supply, cosmetics, and products that emit radiation

### **How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label**

<https://www.fda.gov/food/new-nutrition-facts-label/how-understand-and-use-nutrition-facts-label>