

# Food and Marketing Eco-Labels

## A Consumer's Glossary

### Introduction

More consumers are demanding food products that are not only healthier, fresher and more nutritious, but also produced in a manner that is safe for the environment. As these products appear on the shelves, labels may list unfamiliar terms. Organic. All natural. Pesticide-free. What do they mean? How are they different from conventional (and, what is conventional, anyway?) In an effort to help sort through this confusing maze, a number of food packaging and marketing label terms are explained here.

*Please note:* While some label terms have a precise definition and are backed by government regulation and/or other third-party certification, this is not always the case. Third-party certification generally makes a label more meaningful and reliable; label terms lacking a precise definition are open to interpretation and are less reliable. They are often used solely at the discretion of the producer or processor. Carefully checking the entire product label or contacting the producer/manufacturer may be necessary to verify the meaning.

### Definitions

**American Humane Certified**, formerly **Free Farmed**, is the trademark of a voluntary, fee-based certification program of



the American Humane Society. This organization establishes guidelines for the humane care and handling of farm animals. Qualifying products bear their official logo.

[http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pa\\_farm\\_animals](http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pa_farm_animals)

**Biodynamics** is a type of organic farming system that views the farm as a living, dynamic, spiritual entity and attempts to bring it into balance.

<http://www.biodynamics.com/>



**Certified Humane Raised and Handled** is a voluntary, fee-based certification program for meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products.

The program provides independent verification that animals were raised and handled humanely. Certified Humane has instituted animal welfare standards that are considered stricter than current laws require. Qualifying products bear the organization's official logo.

<http://CertifiedHumane.com>

**Certified Naturally Grown** (CNG) is a grassroots alternative to the USDA National Organic Program (NOP).

CNG puts less emphasis on some NOP rules (such as record-keeping) while using NOP production practices as the basis for its own organic standards. Farms that have been inspected and certified by CNG members can use the organization's logo on their products.

<http://www.naturallygrown.org/>



**Conventional** indicates the product was produced using traditional agricultural practices, which often include a reliance on pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. This term is frequently used in contrast to organic agricultural systems; products that are not “organic” are referred to as “conventional.” (Similar terms: *Conventional Farming; Conventional Agriculture; Conventional Grower*)

**Cruelty-free** implies that farm animals were treated humanely and no animal testing was used in the manufacture or processing of the product. There is no official definition or standard for this term.

**Demeter** appears as the brand name or logo on products produced or certified by the Demeter Association. This company establishes the specific guidelines for biodynamic production and certification.



<http://www.demeter-usa.org/>

**Environmentally Friendly** is a general term used to describe products or services that have resulted in minimal to no harm to the environment during production or processing. There is no official definition or standard for this term. (Similar terms: *Planet-friendly; Green*)

**Free Range** implies that animals, such as cattle and poultry, are raised in the open and are free to roam. In actuality, it often means that the animals have had access to the outdoors for an unspecified length of time (as little as 5 minutes per day can qualify). The USDA regulates this term only on poultry, while its use on eggs and beef is not government-regulated. (Similar term: *Free Roaming*)

**GMO-Free** products have been produced without the use of a Genetically Modified Organism. GMOs are created when the gene of one organism is introduced into the genetic material of another organism to improve its quality or performance (e.g. disease resistance or pesticide immunity).

The use of this label is regulated by the individual companies that produce, distribute or process the product. (Similar terms: *No GMO; Genetic Engineering Free; GE Free*)

**Home-produced and processed** refers to food products that were processed in a home kitchen with predominantly home-grown ingredients. Qualifying producers must meet certain minimum requirements; however, home-processors are not subject to the same safeguards and inspections required of commercial processors. Home-produced agricultural products can only be marketed at farmers markets registered with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, certified roadside stands listed with the Kentucky Farm Bureau, or at the processor’s farm. (Similar terms: *Home-based Processor; Home-based Microprocessor*)

**Integrated Pest Management (IPM)** indicates that the grower used a combination of biological, cultural, and chemical tools to reduce crop damage from insects, diseases and weeds. These strategies are employed to minimize environmental risks, economic costs and health hazards. Pesticides are used minimally and judiciously as only one part of the pest management strategy. There is no official standard or definition for this term.

**Kentucky Proud** is a registered service mark regulated by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture (KDA). The logo signifies that the product was grown, processed or crafted within the state of Kentucky.



<http://www.kyagr.com/kyproud/index.htm>

**Natural** refers to foods or food additives that are not produced or manufactured. Natural foods contain no artificial ingredients, including preservatives, and have undergone minimal processing. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate the use

of this term except when used on fresh meat and poultry, where it means “minimally processed and free of artificial products.” Natural is not synonymous with “organic” or “sustainable.” (Similar terms: *All Natural*; *100% Natural*; *Made From Natural Ingredients*; *Made with Natural Ingredients*; *All Natural Ingredients*; *Totally Natural*; *Natural Food*; *Natural Flavors*)

**Naturally Grown** is a general term that suggests the crop was produced without pesticides or other synthetic chemicals. There is no official definition or standard for this term. (Compare with: *Certified Naturally Grown*)

**Organic** is regulated by the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) and can only be used in the manners described below. Organic crop production refers to an agricultural system that follows the specific, legal requirements outlined in NOP regulations. For example, no GMOs are permitted and crops are produced without the use of synthetic pesticides or fertilizers. Growers are certified by a USDA-approved certifying agency (such as the KDA) only after they have demonstrated compliance with stringent NOP standards. Consumers purchase organic products for various reasons, including flavor, perceived health benefits, and environmental concerns. The USDA does not make any claims that organic farm products are safer or more nutritious than conventionally-produced products.

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/Consumers/brochure.html>

~**Certified organic** is used to label a farm, farmer or product that has been certified in accordance with USDA National Organic Program regulations. Producers and handlers must be certified organic to sell, label or represent their products as certified organic. The USDA organic logo may be used on these products.



~**100% organic** products contain only certified organically produced ingredients (with the exception of salt and water). Producers and handlers must be certified organic to sell, label or represent their products as “100% organic.” The USDA logo may be used on these products.

~**Organic** refers to products in which 95% or more of their ingredients are certified organic. Producers and handlers must be certified organic to sell, label or represent their products as “organic.” The USDA logo may be used on these products.

~**Made with organic ingredients** refers to products that contain certified organic ingredients. At least 70% of the ingredients must be organic; the label may list up to three of these ingredients. Producers and handlers must be certified organic to sell, label or represent their products as “made with organic products.” The USDA organic logo may not be used on these products.

**Organically inclined** suggests that the producer prefers organic crop production techniques, but it does not guarantee that organic methods were used exclusively. This term is not synonymous with “certified organic” or other similar USDA-regulated terms.

**Pesticide-free** crops are those that have been produced without the use of insecticides, herbicides, fungicides or rodenticides. (Similar terms: *No Spray*, *Pesticide-free and Herbicide-free*; *Chemical-free*)

**Residue-free** signifies that a product does not have pesticide residues above an established limit set by the producer or company. This label does not mean that pesticides were not used at any time, nor does it indicate that the product is 100% free of any chemical residue. It merely states that residue levels are below their standard or not detectable. (Similar term: *No Detected Residues*)

**Sustainable** is used to identify foods that were

produced in a manner that does not compromise the earth's natural resources for future generations. Sustainable practices are meant to allow a farm or farm system to continue to produce indefinitely. In addition to environmental quality concerns, sustainable agriculture also addresses the economic and social issues of the farm community. There is no official definition or standard for this term. Sustainable is not synonymous with "organic" or "natural." (Similar terms: *Sustainably Farmed; Sustainably Grown*)

**Transitional** refers to products from fields or farms that are in the process of being converted from conventional production to certified organic production. The USDA requires a minimum transition period of three full years, during which time the grower must comply with all National Organic Program standards. Transitional growers cannot sell their products as "organic" or "certified organic" even though they are following organic production practices. (Similar term: *Transitioning to Organic*)

**Vegan** is used to label food products that do not contain any animal products (e.g. beef, pork, poultry, fish, seafood) or any products derived from animals (e.g. eggs, milk, honey). There is no official definition or standard for this term. (Similar terms: *100% Vegan; No Animal By-products; No Animal Ingredients*)

~**Certified Vegan** is a voluntary, fee-based certification program administered by the Vegan Awareness Council (also known as VeganAction). Their logo may appear only on food, cosmetics, clothing and other products that are free of all animal products and have not been tested on animals. VeganAction does not test or otherwise monitor the production process, but relies on signed written statements



from applicants in issuing certification.

<http://www.vegan.org/campaigns/certification/index.html>

**Vegetarian** is used to label foods that do not contain meat, poultry, fish or seafood. Because there are many categories of practicing vegetarians, some of whom also refrain from eggs, milk and/or other animal products, the consumer should carefully check the label for ingredients. The term vegetarian does not have an official definition or standard. (Similar terms: *100% Vegetarian; No Animal Ingredients; No Animal By-products*)

## More Information

### Government Web sites

- Food Labeling: Meat and Poultry Labeling Terms (USDA-FSIS)

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Meat\\_&Poultry\\_Labeling\\_Terms/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Meat_&Poultry_Labeling_Terms/index.asp)

- Food labeling (USDA)

[http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=4&tax\\_level=1&tax\\_subject=273](http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=4&tax_level=1&tax_subject=273)

- Food Labeling: Organic Foods (USDA)

[http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal\\_display/index.php?info\\_center=4&tax\\_level=2&tax\\_subject=273&topic\\_id=1318](http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=4&tax_level=2&tax_subject=273&topic_id=1318)

### Commercial Web sites \*

- Consumer Reports Greener Choices – Eco-labels Center (Consumers Union)

<http://www.greenerchoices.org/eco-labels/eco-home.cfm>

- Labels: What Lies Beneath (National Geographic, The Green Guide, 2004)

<http://www.thegreenguide.com/doc/105/labels>

- Sustainable Dictionary (Sustainable Table)

<http://www.sustainabletable.org/intro/dictionary/>

\* Some readers may find these commercial Web sites helpful. Including them here does not represent an endorsement of these sites or their products by the University of Kentucky.