

buy  organic!

Making Sense of Labels

Keep your head from spinning!

Ever wonder about the differences between “100 Percent Organic,” “Organic,” and “Made with Organic”? And what about terms like “Natural” and “Free Range” and “Non-GMO”? This handy guide will help you sort out the labels for your next shopping trip.



100 Percent Organic

Products made only with ingredients that have been certified organic may carry the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Organic seal.

Organic

At least 95 percent of the ingredients by weight (water and salt are excluded) have been produced organically. These foods may carry the USDA Organic seal.

Made with Organic

Products that contain at least 70 percent organic ingredients may be labeled “Made with Organic.” Up to three of those ingredients can be listed on the front panel.

Natural

This term carries far less weight than an organic label, since the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not developed a definition for “natural” regarding food labels. According to the FDA website, “the agency has not objected to the use of the term if the food does not contain added color, artificial flavors, or synthetic substances.”

Non-GMO

The Non-GMO Project Verified seal indicates that a product was made according to consensus-based best practices for avoiding genetically modified organisms. It does not necessarily mean that a product is organic.

Free Range

Poultry and their eggs (but no other meats) can be certified as free range by the USDA. It means that the poultry must have access to the outdoors for more than half their lives, but other requirements are not stringent. Your best bet is to choose poultry and eggs that are certified organic.

Grass-Fed

USDA grass-fed beef has continuous access to pasture during growing season.

Local

There are no national standards for this, although some states define local as being from that state or within a few miles of it.

Wild Caught

This label pertains to fish or shellfish that has been “caught, taken, or harvested from noncontrolled”—i.e., wild—“waters or beds.”

Farm Raised

This applies to fish or seafood that was harvested using standard aquaculture methods in a controlled environment. Like conventionally produced meat, farmed seafood may contain chemicals and be produced with the use of antibiotics and growth hormones.

Organic Seafood

The US government does not presently certify seafood as organic, but is planning to do so within a few years. If you buy a seafood product with an organic label, that means it was farmed in accordance with standards set by either a private organization or a country other than the United States.

SELECTED SOURCES “Behind the Labels,” www.Humanitarian.org ■ “Organic Aquaculture,” USDA Department of Agriculture, <http://afsic.nal.usda.gov> ■ “USDA to Propose Standards for Organic Seafood Raised in US” by Mary Clare Jalonick, www.PBS.org, 4/16/15 ■ “What Does ‘Natural’ Really Mean on Food Labels?” www.CBSNews.com, 6/16/14

