



"Improve the economic well-being of agriculture and enrich the quality of farm family life."

Let's Talk About: *Food Labels*

In the U.S., food labeling is required for most prepared foods, such as bread, cereals, canned and frozen foods, snacks, desserts, drinks, etc.ⁱ Food labels must list calories, calories from fat, total fat, trans fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, iron and calcium content. Also, any vitamins or minerals found in enriched foods must be listed. Finally, there must be an ingredient list which includes specific additives such as color additives, casienate, and protein hydrolysates.ⁱⁱ

All of these requirements are determined by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) based on scientific and medical guidance. For example, FDA requires labeling of ingredients that impact widespread human allergies (e.g. peanuts).

In recent years, many companies have introduced labels to increase the marketability of the product. FDA approved descriptors and health claims may be added to labels.ⁱⁱⁱ Consumers may select products based on labels like all natural, grass fed or organic while being unsure of the true meaning of the labels. In order to keep labels truthful, FDA seeks voluntary compliance from food companies.^{iv}

Illinois Farm Bureau Policy

The Illinois Farm Bureau ("IFB") supports the "Promotion of increased use of nutritional information on food labels." Additionally IFB supports "the science based labeling policies of the FDA [including] voluntary labeling using statements which are truthful and not misleading." IFB opposes "Labels that state or imply organic food is superior to traditional agri-food products or that imply negative consequences of consuming non-organic foods over organic products."^v

All Natural

- According to FDA, "it is difficult to define a food product that is 'natural' because the food is probably been processed and is no longer the product of the earth."
- "FDA has not developed a definition for use of the term natural or its derivatives but does not object to the use of the term if the food does not contain added color, artificial flavors or synthetic substances."^{vi}
- USDA classifies minimally processed foods without artificial ingredients as natural.^{vii}

Antibiotic Free^{viii}

- Antibiotic-free labels indicate livestock raised without the use of antibiotics.
- All meat is free from antibiotics due to governmental regulations and farmer compliance. Farmers follow withdrawal periods that ensure that no residues are present in the product.

Free Range^{ix}

- The USDA does not define free range or free roaming labeling terms.

- Required provisions for the “free range” label use are unlimited access to food, fresh water, and continuous access to the outdoors.
 - Continuous access to the outdoors can mean several things. Livestock may have access to the outdoors and choose to be inside near feed and water, or the facility may contain windows.

Grass Fed

- After weaning, livestock are fed nothing but grass and other forages.
- Acceptable feed sources are: annual and perennial grasses, legumes, cereal grains in the pre-grain state, hay, haylage, baleage, silage, and crop residue without grain.
- Animals must have continuous access to grass during the growing season^x but the USDA makes no specific housing regulations.
- There are no regulations for grass fed animals, past those applied to conventionally-raised livestock for antibiotic or hormone use.
- Grass-fed beef may have some heart-health benefits. For example, compared to other types of beef there may be less total fat. However, “lean beef that’s 10% fat or less, whether it’s grass-fed, or another type of beef can be part of a heart-healthy diet.”
- According to Mayo Clinic, there is limited long-term research showing grass-fed beef is better for you.^{xi}

No Added Hormones

- No hormones were administered during the animal’s lifetime.^{xii}
- Hormones are approved for use in beef cattle and lamb production. Using “hormone-free” or “no hormone added” labels on pork or poultry is false advertising as the use of hormones is not permitted in these species.^{xiii}

Organic

- Organic foods are produced according to the standards in the Organics Food Production Act (OFPA).^{xiv} An organic label means:^{xv}
 - The use of irradiation, sewage sludge, synthetic fertilizers, prohibited pesticides and genetically modified organisms is not permitted.
 - Livestock is produced according to health and welfare standards, without the use of antibiotics or growth hormones, feed with 100% organic feed and provided with access to the outdoors.
 - 95% of the ingredients of multi-ingredient organic foods must be organic.
 - Before products can be labeled USDA Organic, a USDA-accredited certifying agent must verify the production practices as compliant with organic regulations.
- Organic food is not safer nor is it healthier than conventionally grown foods.^{xvi}

For information on Genetically Modified food labeling, please see [Let’s Talk About: GM Labeling](#).

ⁱ U.S. Food and Drug Administration. “Labeling & Nutrition”. 2015. Web. 14 July 2015.

ⁱⁱ MedlinePlus. “Food labeling”. U.S. National Library of Medicine. 15 May 2014. Web. 21 July 2015.

ⁱⁱⁱ MedlinePlus. “Food labeling”. U.S. National Library of Medicine. 15 May 2014. Web. 21 July 2015.

^{iv} Nigowetti, Nicole E. “Food Labeling Litigation: Exposing Gaps in the FDA’s Resources and Regulatory Authority.” Governance Studies at Brookings. June 2014. Web. 21 July 2015.

^v Illinois Farm Bureau. (2015). Food Labeling. *Policy Resolutions*. (pp.76). Bloomington, IL.

^{vi} U.S. Food and Drug Administration. “What is the meaning of ‘natural’ on the label of food.” 8 June 2015. Web. 20 July 2015.

^{vii} National Chicken Council. “Chickopedia: What Consumers Need to Know.” Web. 20 July 2015.

^{viii} National Chicken Council. “Chickopedia: What Consumers Need to Know.” Web. 20 July 2015.

^{ix} The Center for Agriculture and Food Systems Vermont Law School. “Glossary.” 2015. Web. 14 July 2015.

^x USDA Agriculture Marketing Service Grading, Certification and Verification. “Grass Fed Marketing Claim Standards.” 29 September 2008. Web. 20 July 2015.

^{xi} Mankad, Rekha M.D. “Does grass-fed beef have any heart-health benefits that other types of beef don’t?” Mayo Clinic. 27 December 2014. Web. 20 July 2015.

^{xii} The Center for Agriculture and Food Systems Vermont Law School. “Glossary.” 2015. Web. 14 July 2015.

^{xiii} USDA. “Meat and Poultry Labeling Terms.” 24 October 2014. Web. 20 July 2015.

^{xiv} The Center for Agriculture and Food Systems Vermont Law School. “Organic and Natural Processed Food.” 2015. Web. 14 July 2015.

^{xv} United States Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service National Organic Program. “Organic Standards.” 11 June 2015. Web. 20 July 2015.

^{xvi} Mayo Clinic Staff. “Organic foods: Are they safer? More nutritious?” Mayo Clinic. 9 June 2014. Web. 20 July 2015.