



JEFFERSON COUNTY FARMERS & NEIGHBORS, INC.



FARMS, NOT FACTORIES!

KNOW YOUR LABELS: A GUIDE TO BUYING RESPONSIBLY RAISED MEAT, DAIRY AND EGGS

It's ideal to shop locally and know your farmer. When that's not possible and you need to rely on labels, this guide with information compiled from the ASPCA and Environmental Working Group (EWG) can help you make the best choices. Labels aren't always reliable, so if possible, look for these certifications. But certifications also have a variety of strengths and limitations. The following are those that ASPCA and EWG predominantly recommend, but we suggest you learn more about each label online. The Real Organic Project is a new add-on label distinguishing a higher level of organic production, and we include that as well.

Most Reliable Certifications According to ASPCA and/or EWG:

- **Animal Welfare Approved by AGW (AWA)**
- **Certified Grassfed by AGW (CGW)**
- **Certified Humane Raised & Handled (CHRH)**
- **Animal Welfare Certified by the Global Animal Partnership (GAP)** *Note – Six certification levels, Steps 1-5+. Mostly used in Whole Foods*
- **American Grassfed (AG)**
- **Food Alliance Certified (FAC)**
- **Real Organic Project (ROP)**
- **USDA Organic (USDAO)**

“Antibiotic-Free” – Label not USDA approved. Look for “No Antibiotics Administered”, “No Antibiotics Added”, or “Raised Without Antibiotics.” **Certifications:** AWA, GAP-All Steps, AG, FAC, ROP, USDAO. *Note: CHRH prohibits routine antibiotics but allows use for sick animals.*

Breed Claims – Specific breed claims or “heritage breed” are not USDA formally defined and aren’t reliable. *(Know your farmer for certainty about heritage breeds.)*

“Cage-Free” – Egg-laying chickens are not kept in battery cages but are often still closely confined in factory farms. **Certifications:** AWA, GAP Step 5 and 5+, CHRH, ROP, USDAO. Chicken and turkeys raised for meat are not caged, therefore “cage-free” labels are meaningless, however, they are typically raised in CAFOs.

“Free Range” – USDA label only applies to poultry, but size, quality and length of access is unregulated and widely varies. **Certifications:** GAP Step 5 and 5+, AG, ROP, USDAO and CHRH. *Note - CHRH certification doesn’t apply to dairy cows.*

“Grass-Fed” – No federal standards, and cows may be grain fed at end of their lives. Look for “100% Grassfed Only.” **Certifications:** CGW, AG, FAC, ROP, or GAP Step 5 and 5+.

“Hormone Free”– Label not approved. Look for “No Hormones Added” or “No Hormones Administered.” Only applicable to milk and beef. Label is meaningless for chickens, turkeys and pigs as hormone treatment is prohibited, however pigs may be fed ractopamine, a beta agonist. Milk labeled “rGBH-Free” is false as cows make their own hormones. Instead look for “Not Treated with rGBH or rBST.” **Certifications:** AWA, CHRH, GAP-All Steps, AW, ROP, USDAO.

“Humanely Raised” or “Humanely Handled” – No USDA definition therefore the terms meaningless.

Certifications: CHRH, AWA, GAP Step 5 and 5+, AG, FAC, ROP, USDAO.

“Natural” – Meaningless, only applied to how livestock is slaughtered. **Certifications:** AWA, CHRH, GAP Step 5 and 5+, AG, FAC, ROP, USDAO.

“Pastured, Pasture-Raised, or Pasture-Grown” – No federal standards. Look for “100% Grassfed Only.” **Certifications:** CGW, CHRH, GAP Step 5 and 5+, AG, FAC, ROP.

“Vegetarian-Fed” – No legal definition nor necessarily better. Chickens and turkeys eat insects and grubs.

Certifications Not Recommended By ASPCA and/or EWG

- **American Humane Certified** – Does specify minimum space for natural behaviors, but animals can be confined. Conducts inspections and audits, but allows use of routine antibiotics.
- **One Health Certified** – No strengths. Lacks standards, and reflects conventional industry guidelines.

Learn more about each certification:

ASPCA: bit.ly/3rYqBl5

Environmental Working Group: bit.ly/385KQGk

Real Organic Project: <https://bit.ly/3Ji8zCs>

Note - other organizations may recommend additional certifications. We encourage you to explore more options.

Recommended Certifications (Depending on Label)



Look for
Step
Numbers on
bottom of
the each
GAP label.



NOT Recommended by ASPCA and EWG

