



Consumer Focus

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Decoding mystery behind food claims

CommonGround™ farmers provide consumers a description of typical label claims, urging them to shop smart and know the rules before they buy.

A new start

As the calendar flipped to 2013, millions of Americans set goals to live healthier lifestyles in the new year. In addition to extra hours at the gym, many grocery shoppers will also spend more time ensuring their carts are filled with healthier options to feed their families. Today's plethora of labels and buzzwords adorning food packages makes that task daunting. In fact, many of the labels, such as "grass-fed" and "organic," that suggest food is healthier refer only to how it was raised, not to the nutritional content.

Confused? You aren't alone. Volunteer farmers with the CommonGround™ program, a grassroots movement to start conversations about farming and food, want to help shoppers demystify several common food labels and make their trip to the market a little less stressful.

"We are truly blessed to have so many food choices available to us at the grocery store," said Missouri farmer and CommonGround volunteer Renee Fordyce. "With so many food



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Conversations About Farming and Food

options available, I want moms to feel good about their food choices and know that farmers share many of the same values and priorities when it comes to feeding our own families."

What exactly do all of the labels mean?

Organic. Organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. To be labeled "organic," a government-approved certifier must inspect the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer meets all the rules necessary to comply with USDA organic standards.

Free-range. This label indicates that the flock was provided shelter in a building, room or area with unlimited access to food,

fresh water and continuous access to the outdoors during their production cycle. The outdoor area may or may not be fenced and/or covered with netting-like material. This label is regulated by the USDA.

Cage-free. This label indicates that the flock was able to freely roam a building, room or enclosed area with unlimited access to food and fresh water during their production cycle.

Natural. As required by USDA, meat, poultry and egg products labeled as "natural" must be minimally processed and contain no artificial ingredients. However, the natural label does not include any standards regarding farm practices and only applies to processing of meat and egg products. There are no standards or regulations for the labeling of natural food products if they do not contain meat or eggs.

Grass-fed. Grass-fed animals receive a majority of their nutrients from grass throughout their lives, while organic animals' pasture diet may be supplemented with grain. Also USDA-regulated, the grass-fed label does not limit the use of antibiotics, hormones or pesticides. Meat products may be labeled as "grass-fed organic."

Pasture-raised. Due to the number of variables involved in pasture-raised agricultural systems, the USDA has not developed a labeling policy for pasture-raised products.

Humane. Multiple labeling programs make claims that animals were treated humanely during the production cycle, but the verification of these claims varies widely. These labeling programs are not regulated under a single USDA definition.

All of the food labels listed above refer to how food is raised, not to its nutritional value.

Have another question about your food? Find CommonGround online at www.findourcommonground.com; on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.



Editor's Note: *This article was provided as a release by CommonGround, a grassroots movement to foster conversation among women — on farms and in cities — about where our food comes from. The United Soybean Board (USB) and the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA) developed CommonGround to give farm women the opportunity to engage with consumers through the use of a wide range of activities. USB and NCGA provide support and a platform for the volunteers to tell their stories.*