



Demystifying Food Labels: General Labels for All Meat Products

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Overview of Food Product Labels

For producers and consumers alike, the meaning behind the labels found on meat products may be confusing. The purpose of this publication is to provide printable guides, or infographics, that contain information meant to improve buyer understanding of retail food product labels. Each infographic contains basic facts and straightforward definitions of common words and phrases included on labels used on food products found in grocery stores nationwide.

What is the purpose of adding labels to retail food products?

Each label signifies an important attribute – or feature that appeal to consumers – about that product to the end users. Legal and regulatory agencies require specific attributes, such as “sell by” or “use by” date labels. Labels on similar product or commodities may include attributes to gain a higher price relative to competitors’ offerings. Supermarkets and food manufacturers use labels to communicate information that creates demand for food items. Some labels are

managed and certified by a governmental agency, while others are managed by third party organizations. Whether you are a producer or consumer, it is important to understand how each of these labels are defined by their respective organizations to create a more transparent flow of information from the producer to the consumer.

General Labels Found on All Meat Products

Each of the following infographics are available on the Virginia Cooperative Extension Food as a Business portal (click the “Media” tab).

Natural Label

While all meat is sourced from animals, a few of the meat products you find at the grocery store are labeled differently because

natural

adj. /'nɑCH(ə)rəl/

1. No artificial ingredients
2. No added color
3. Minimally processed



MINIMALLY PROCESSED

The product was processed in a manner that does not fundamentally alter the product.

ALL RAW & SINGLE INGREDIENT MEAT AND POULTRY QUALIFY AS NATURAL



but There are no limitations on these products containing flavoring solutions as long as the solutions are minimally processed and not artificial.



these items are processed beyond the natural state of being.

Fresh Label

Labeling of fresh meat is based on very specific requirements and product categories. For example, when meat is labelled “fresh” this conveys to the buyer that it has never been frozen or heated. No preservatives are allowed in fresh meat products.



Kosher Label

Kosher labels indicate that these meat products are prepared in accordance with Jewish law. However, meat products sourced from swine cannot be considered for Kosher labelling, as pork products are prohibited by Jewish laws. All Kosher products must be prepared under rabbinical (the Jewish faith leader) supervision.



Lean and Extra Lean Labels

When a label includes the words “lean” or

“extra lean,” this refers to the amount of total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol the meat contains. Lean meat less than 10 grams of total fat and 4.5 grams of

saturated fat per 100 gram serving. Extra lean meat has less than 5 grams of total fat and 2 grams of saturated fat per 100 gram serving.

Both lean and extra lean meat must have less than 95 milligrams of

cholesterol per 100 gram serving (USDA-Food Safety Inspection Service).

LEAN MEAT	
definition	
Per 100 grams	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.5 grams or less of saturated fat • Less than 10 grams of total fat • Less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol 	
lean point	97 / 3
EXTRA LEAN MEAT	
definition	
Per 100 grams	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 grams or less of saturated fat • Less than 5 grams of total fat • Less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol 	

Mechanically

Separated Label

This label is on meat that is made into a paste-like or batter-like product. This is done through a process of forcing bones with edible meat on them through a sieve. To a producer, using more of the harvested animal to produce additional products may result in higher revenues per animal.

No Hormones Added Label

For beef and lamb products, producers may use hormones in animal production to increase the amount or quality of meat per animal. Sufficient

documentation to verify the animals were raised

without the addition of hormones in order to qualify for the “no hormones added” label.

In the US, pork, poultry, and goat producers are **not** allowed to use hormones, and therefore qualify for the “no hormones added” label. The following statement must accompany the “no hormones added” label: “Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones.”

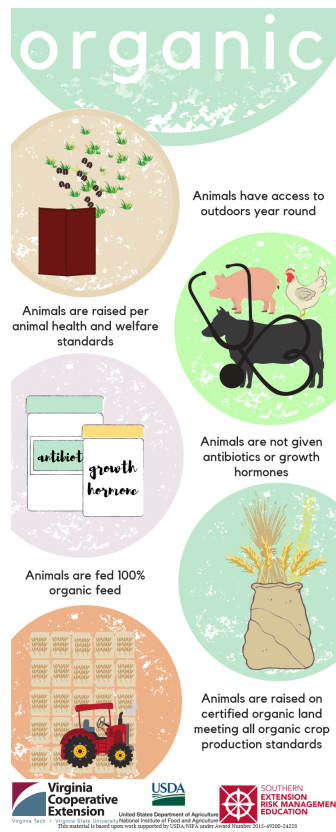
No Antibiotics Added Label

To use the “no antibiotics added” label, the Food Safety Inspection Service requires documentation from the producers to prove that antibiotics were not given to that animal. Over the past six decades, antibiotic usage has increased in

animal production, and consumers are concerned this may result in increased antibiotic resistance throughout the food chain (“cast the antibiotic”: “Drug Promotes Growth,” Science News Letter 57, no. 16 (April 22, 1950): 243.)

Organic Label

The USDA (?) organic label has stricter guidelines than the “no hormones added” and the “no antibiotics added” labels. Under the organic label, animals are not allowed to receive either hormones or antibiotics over the course of its lifetime. Animals must be provided with access to the outdoors year around and consume only 100% organically-grown feed. All pasture used to raise animals must meet all organic crop production standards, which includes sourcing from non-genetically modified organisms.



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More Resources

https://www.fsis.usda.gov/shared/PDF/Labeling_Requirements_Guide.pdf

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/food-labeling/meat-and-poultry-labeling-terms/meat-and-poultry-labeling-terms>

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/rules-regulations/cool>

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/regulatory-compliance/labeling/claims-guidance/procedures-nongenetically-engineered-statement>

<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/AAALiveAnimalSpecification.pdf>

<https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/types/meat/index.html>

Non-GMO Label

While meat producing animals cannot be genetically modified, they may be fed genetically modified (GMO) feed. The “Non-GMO” label on meat refers to animals that were **not** fed grain or feedstuffs grown with GMO seed. This is regulated by a third party ([Non-GMO Project](#)) accredited by the USDA.