

## **A Glossary of Growing Methods and Marketing Terms for Agricultural Products**

### **Cage-Free:**

This implies that poultry were raised without cages, but does not guarantee that birds were allowed access to the outdoors, or were raised on pasture. Cage-free birds may be raised in large flocks in commercial confinement facilities with open floor plans. There is no independent verification of “Cage-Free” claims.

### **Certified Organic:**

In order to be labeled “organic,” products must meet the federal organic standards determined by the USDA. Organic foods cannot be grown using synthetic fertilizers, chemicals or sewage sludge; cannot be genetically modified; and cannot be irradiated. Organic meat and poultry must be fed only organically-grown feed and cannot be treated with hormones or antibiotics. Sick animals may receive antibiotic treatments, in which case they are not eligible for organic certification. A processed product must contain at least 95% organic ingredients to receive organic certification.

### **Certified Naturally Grown:**

An alternative certification based on, and largely identical, to the USDA’s Certified Organic standards. CNG is overseen by a non-profit group with inspections performed largely by peer farmers and is intended as a more affordable alternative for small, highly diversified farmers.

### **Confined (or concentrated) Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO):**

Animal feeding facilities are defined as CAFOs by the EPA if they exceed a threshold number of animals and/or discharge waste into the “waters of the United States.” Facilities may also be defined as CAFOs if they confine their animals for at least 45 days in a 12 month period and do not provide grass or other vegetation in the confinement area during the normal growing season.

### **Conventional Farming:**

Conventional farming refers to standard agricultural practices widespread in the industry. In crop production these can include the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, and “mono-cropping.” Conventionally raised animals are often treated with antibiotics and growth hormones and fed conventionally grown grain. Their diets may also include animal byproducts. Conventional farming can also include the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs).

### **Fair trade:**

Fair trade generally implies that farmers and farm workers in developing countries receive a fair price for their product, have direct trade relations with buyers and access to credit, engage in sustainable farming methods, have safe working conditions, and do not use child labor. Products may receive a Fair Trade Certified label from Transfair USA which is the only independent, non-profit, third-party fair trade certifier in the US and is a member of Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International.

### **Free range:**

Free range is regulated by the USDA for use on poultry only (not eggs), and requires that birds be given access to the outdoors for an undetermined period each day. In practice, the “Free Range” claim does not guarantee that the animal actually spent any period of time outdoors, only that access was available. Birds may have been raised in large flocks in commercial confinement facilities with open floor plans.

### **Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs):**

These are organisms containing genes that have been transferred by humans from other organisms of the same or different species. There is no independent verification for “GMO-Free” claims.

### **Grass-fed:**

As defined by the American Grassfed Association (AGA), this claim means that animals live on pasture, consume a natural forage diet, and do not receive hormones or antibiotics to enhance growth or output. Sick animals may receive antibiotic treatments, in which case they are not eligible for AGA certification. However, the USDA has only defined “grassfed” to mean animals that consume a diet of grasses and silage and does not prohibit confinement, or hormone and antibiotic treatments. Suppliers should be clear on which standard they claim to meet, though as yet there is no independent verification under either standard. “Grassfed” claims are sometimes qualified with supplemental “Grain Finished” claims which also describe the conventional industrial livestock feeding model.

### **Hormone Free:**

The USDA prohibits the use of the term “Hormone Free,” but meats can be labeled “No Hormones Administered” meaning that animals did not receive hormone injections or feed supplements. Federal law prohibits the use of hormones in hogs and poultry. Claims are often made that milk products are “rBGH-Free” and/or “rBST-Free” (rBGH and rBST refer to the same synthetic hormone). “rBGH/rBST-free” implies that a cow has not been treated with this hormone, which increases milk production and may cause added stress to the cow, and is a synthetic version of a natural cow hormone. Some dairy processors require the farmers they purchase from to provide an affidavit that their cows are not treated with rBST/rGBH. There is often no independent verification of hormone claims though processors may do their own farm inspections.

### **Humanely Raised:**

There are a variety of competing nongovernmental standards for humane certification all of which generally stress access to clean and sufficient food and water, a safe

environment, protection from extreme weather, sufficient space to move naturally, and prompt treatment for sick animals.

### **Integrated Pest Management (IPM):**

An approach to pest management that employs a variety of produce farming practices to control pests and plant diseases, such as encouraging natural predators and parasites, crop rotation, and cultivating pest resistant plant varieties, to avoid and mitigate pest problems. IPM programs use information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment, in combination with available pest control strategies (including pesticides), to manage pest damage by the most economical means and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment.

### **Irradiation (electronic pasteurization):**

Irradiation is the process of exposing food to radiation such as X-rays or Gamma rays as a means of killing potentially harmful bacteria in foods.

### **Local:**

Local is most often defined as food grown within a particular geographic area, or within a specific distance from the point of purchase. Another way to consider “local” is as food which comes from an identifiable source. It may be grown, produced and marketed by mid-sized and smaller producer-owned businesses, or producer cooperatives. This definition speaks more to public interest in preserving family-scale agriculture, and in strengthening local and regional economies. There is often no independent verification of local claims.

### **Natural:**

USDA guidelines state that “Natural” meat and poultry products can only undergo minimal processing and cannot contain artificial colors, artificial flavors, preservatives, or other artificial ingredients. The term does not guarantee that livestock were humanely raised, or not treated with hormones and antibiotics. It does not guarantee that crops were raised according to any standard. There is typically no independent verification of “natural” claims.

### **Pasture-raised:**

This claim indicates that animals were raised outdoors on a pasture, at least in warmer months, and implies that they ate primarily grasses and other naturally occurring foods commonly found in pastures. In fact, feeding practices may vary and there is typically no independent verification of “pastured” claims.

### **Sustainable:**

There are many potential definitions of sustainable and so we offer several here:

1) Sustainable process is often defined as one that does not diminish the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

2) Sustainable processes are “capable of maintaining their productivity and usefulness to society indefinitely. Such systems... must be resource-conserving, socially supportive, commercially competitive, and environmentally sound.” [John Ikertd, as quoted by Richard Duesterhaus in “Sustainability’s Promise]

3) In an agricultural context, sustainable practices are those that rely on renewable resources, avoid causing irreversible damage to the natural ecosystem, and are economically viable in the long term. These typically include crop rotation, mechanical/biological weed control, water conservation, use of biological sources of soil nitrogen, practices that reduce soil erosion and the risk of water contamination, and pest control strategies that do minimal or no harm to the natural ecosystem.

Compiled and edited by White Dog Community Enterprises

*Disclaimer:* The precise meaning of these terms is evolving as growing methods change along with the demands of the marketplace. The passage of new legislation also has the potential to alter these definitions at any time. Further, the meaning of these terms may vary regionally and are often context-dependent, but we have attempted to offer the most standard definitions available. For additional information please consult the resources below, or visit the farm and talk to the farmer!

*Sources:*

Consumer Reports, Greener Choices

<http://www.greenerchoices.org>

USDA Food Labeling Fact Sheet:

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Meat\\_&\\_Poultry\\_Labeling\\_Terms/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Meat_&_Poultry_Labeling_Terms/index.asp)

“A Guide to Developing a Sustainable Food Purchasing Policy”

Authored by Matthew Buck

Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education

<http://www.foodalliance.org/sustainablefoodpolicy/>

“Sustainable Agriculture: Definitions and Terms”

USDA National Agricultural Library

Compiled by Mary V. Gold