

Decoding Chicken Labeling

- Cage-free
 - Cage-free is essentially meaningless. No chickens raised for meat in the United States are kept in cages. It also does not mean the birds have access to the outdoors since no inspections are required to verify this term.
- Certified Humane
 - Chickens are raised in accordance with guidelines from Humane Farm Animal Care. They establish standards for the environment the birds are raised in and to minimize stress and injuries to chickens during transportation and slaughter. Chickens may or may not have access to the outdoors. Annual inspections are required.
- American Humane Certified
 - Requirements to minimize stress and suffering of the birds are very close to the basic industry standard. Birds are not required to have access to the outdoors. Inspections are required.

Decoding Chicken Labeling

- Free-range
 - There is no definition of "outdoors." There are no requirements as far as the size of the outdoor area (it can be a small concrete slab), the size of the door to the outside, or the amount of time the birds spend there. Chickens can be raised in crowded conditions. No inspections are required for verification.
- Natural
 - A meaningless term. Natural implies products are minimally processed and contain no artificial ingredients, but no inspection is required for verification. Many consumers think "Natural" means no antibiotics or genetically modified feed or the chickens were raised outdoors or that natural equals "organic." Natural is not defined by the USDA or FDA. Chickens labeled natural can be raised using antibiotics and GMO feed.

Decoding Chicken Labeling

- No Antibiotics
 - Chickens were never given antibiotics including in the egg. “Raised without Antibiotics,” means the same thing. No inspections are required for verification.
- No GMOs
 - If you see the "Non-GMO Project Verified" label. The feed contains less than 0.9 percent of GMO crops. Verification is required.
- No Hormones
 - Hormone use is prohibited in chickens raised in the United States. Chicken products that do not have this claim will be free of added hormones as well as steroids.

Decoding Chicken Labeling

- Organic
 - Organic means chickens were fed a vegetarian diet with feed products without genetically modified organisms or toxic syntactic pesticides. Chickens cannot be organically raised with antibiotics, though they can be treated up until their first day of life. Access to the outdoors is required, but there are no specified standards for the size of the outdoor area, the size of the door leading there or the amount of time the birds spend outdoors. Annual inspections are required.
- Pasture Raised
 - Pasture raised is not a legal definition. It implies chickens are raised in grassy pastures. "Animal Welfare Approved" is the only verified label requiring that animals are pasture-raised.