

Planetary Wellbeing

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Buyer Beware! Green Washed Cruelty-Free Labels

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Americans really dislike greenwashing. In fact, 71% of us will stop buying something if we uncover false claims, and vague or misleading cruelty-free claims are no different.^[1] Yet armed with accurate knowledge of what's cruel and what isn't, we can make informed, ethical choices. As our owner (Hart Cunningham) likes to point out, "When people have knowledge about fair commerce practices and low-impact alternative materials and processes, they become more empowered consumers and are much more likely to insist on eco-friendly, environmentally and socially responsible products."

We've put this guide to certified cruelty-free food labels to help dispel myths about common claims made on food in grocery stores so that you can make cruelty-free purchasing decisions that actually benefit the lives of animals. Also check out our guide to [avoiding the most cruel foods](#) on this planet. We're hoping the animal kingdom is stamping their feet with glee right now!

Quick Guide: Green washed Cruelty-Free Labels (Buyer Beware)

1. Terms like **'free range,' 'cage free,' and 'natural'** don't mean much and aren't certifications because these terms are not regulated in the USA. There is also no way to verify 'no antibiotics used' and 'no hormones administered.'
2. **'Pasture raised'** means more than the claims above as it indicates that the eggs or meat came from birds and animals who were provided access to both the outdoors and natural vegetation for at least some of their lives. But you have to take the producer's word for it as they are not audited by an independent third party.
3. Another egg label to be wary of is the **'United Egg Producers Certified.'** It has a third-party certification program but it was developed by the industry for the industry and so there is significant conflict of interest. The program allows hens to spend their entire lives crammed into small cages without any access to the outdoors for exercise, litter for dust bathing, or boxes for nesting. The standard also allows for the routine use of antibiotics and permits cutting the beaks off of birds (de-beaking) without pain relief.
4. Other unregulated (i.e. untrustworthy) labels include the following: **'humanely-raised,' 'natural,' 'naturally raised.'** If you want to truly save farm animals from the cruelty of the factory farm, buy from verifiable labels instead.

Take Action! Recognize Certified Cruelty-Free Logos

1. **The Certified Humane Program:** The Certified Humane program requires animals to be allowed to engage in their natural behaviors, raised with sufficient space, shelter and handling to limit stress. Animals must have access to ample fresh water and a healthy diet without added antibiotics or hormones. This humane food certification program is administered by the Animal Welfare Institute. Use their [Where to Buy](#) database to find where you can buy products with their label.
2. **Animal Welfare Approved:** This program applies to dairy, eggs, chicken, duck, goose, turkey, beef, bison, lamb, goat, pork, and rabbit (more animals than most other programs). It ensures that animals raised under the program are treated with kindness by requiring that they be given regular access to wild spaces. Mutilations such as tail docking of pigs and beak trimming are prohibited, and provisions are made to ensure the slaughter methods are humane. Working dogs are even protected! Use their [Product Search](#) to find out where to buy their certified goods.
3. **Global Animal Partnership 5-Step Rating:** This program applies to chicken, turkey, beef, and pork. It was previously part of the Animal Compassion Foundation and a program of Whole Foods Market. The 5-Step rating system was designed in collaboration with animal welfare advocates, animal welfare scientists and farmers. Unfortunately it only covers their lives and not how they are slaughtered.
4. **Demeter Certified Biodynamic:** This certification is primarily about sustainable agriculture, but it also has a component that requires standards to be used for the protection of animal welfare. The biodynamic principles set out in this program were developed as a way of healing the planet through agriculture. Biodynamic farms are those that work with the cycles of nature, and use techniques like soil fertility management, crop protection, greenhouse management, and so forth.
5. **Food Alliance Certified:** This program applies to dairy, eggs, chicken, beef, bison, goat, lamb, and pork and is a certification program for sustainable farms and food handling to ensure safe and fair labor, better treatment of animals, and stewardship of the planet. It's not exclusively an animal welfare label, but requires humane animal treatment such as access to sunlight, fresh air and water, pasture, enough space to engage in natural and social behaviors. Growth hormones and non-therapeutic antibiotics are prohibited but some mutilations such as beak trimming are still allowed without anesthesia. Use their [Find Good Food](#) database to locate retailers and service providers that use their certified products.
6. **Grass-Fed:** This program has the USDA stamp of approval and also is Animal Welfare Approved. It ensures a grass-fed animal is suckled on its mother, eats fresh grass or hay, and is raised in a pasture for the entirety of its life.
7. **USDA Organic Seal:** This is the highest stamp of certified organic approval and prohibits antibiotics and growth hormones in organic meats like poultry or beef, though it has no specific standards against animal cruelty. It also requires 100% organic feed for livestock.

Dig Deeper: Where your Meat, Dairy, and Eggs Come From

- Check out our guide to the basics of factory farm animal cruelty, and find [10 Ways To Stop Factory Farms](#) via the ASPCA.
- See [who is eating the most meat in the world](#) and get more animal cruelty statistics.

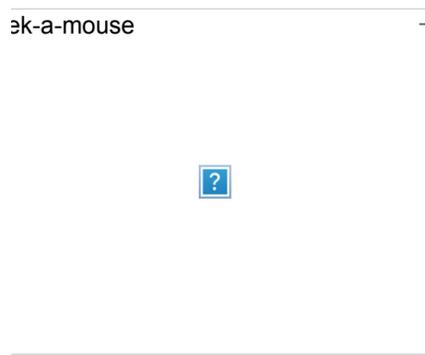
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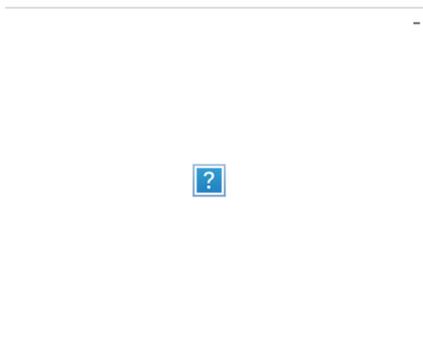


How to Buy Guiltless, Cruelty-Free Foods

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