

VOLUNTARY CERTIFICATIONS

ECO-LABELS, ANIMAL WELFARE AND FAIR TRADE CERTIFICATIONS



Farmers today have a wide range of voluntary labels and third-party certifications they can opt to use to communicate values and production practices to customers. In some cases, products with a particular certification can garner a price premium. In other cases, the certification primarily serves to differentiate a product from the competition. Complying with a particular set of standards may also bring farmers additional benefits, including guidelines for continuous business improvement and additional marketing services provided by a certification program. Farmers using labels or certifications should be prepared to educate their customers and champion the significance of the label's standards of assessment and the farm's related business's practices and products.

This fact sheet includes information on:

- What makes a good label.
- Eco-labels.
- Animal welfare labels.
- Food justice and fair trade labels.
- Additional resources.

What Makes a Good Label?

The labels addressed in this factsheet are a sampling of many certification options. The following labeling programs include a transparent process for keeping the integrity of the standard for use of the label, and have independent third-party verification.

Top five certification considerations

The Global Ecolabelling Network, globalecolabelling.net, suggests using these five criteria when assessing the trustworthiness of a certification mark or registration. This can help when deciding if a certification program is right for your business.

1. **Meaningful, verifiable standards:** Governed by a set of meaningful standards that have an impact in maintaining the values of the label. These standards should be verifiable by the certifying group or another independent inspection organization.

2. **Consistency:** A label used on one product should have the same meaning if used on other products. Standards should be verifiable in a consistent manner for different products.
3. **Transparency:** The organization behind a label should make information about organizational structure, funding, board of directors, and certification standards available to the public.
4. **Independence:** Certifying organizations and their employees should not have any ties to, and should not receive any funding, sales fees, or contributions from logo users, except fees for certification. Employees of companies whose products are certified, or who are applying for certification, should not be affiliated in any way with the certifier.
5. **Public comment:** All certification standards should be developed with input from multiple stakeholders, including consumers, industry, environmentalists, and social representatives, in a way that doesn't compromise the independence of the certifier. Industry representatives, for example, can play an important advisory role without having direct financial, decision-making, or management ties to the certifier.

Note: Listing of these labeling program websites does not constitute an endorsement by WSDA of any of the views expressed there. It is intended only as a resource for information about voluntary certification options.

Eco-labels

Voluntary eco-labels are used worldwide to communicate about the environmental performance of farms and businesses. Sometimes called, "green labels," they convey a variety of farm business values and agricultural practices that protect soil, water, biodiversity, animals, wildlife, and other natural resources, while reducing the use of petroleum-based energy and inputs, pollution, and other toxins. Organic certification is perhaps one of the most familiar "eco-labels." The Consumers Union maintains a searchable online resource of many voluntary labels at greenerchoices.org/labels.

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The following eco-labels are governed by a formal set of publicly available standards. Compliance with the standard is verified by a third-party audit.

Organic certification

[usda.gov/topics/organic](https://www.usda.gov/topics/organic)

USDA National Organic Program holds strict production and labeling requirements for farms and businesses that make organic claims applied to food, feed, fiber, and other consumer products in the United States. The WSDA Organic Program is accredited to manage the inspection and certification of organic operations. Please see the "Organic Certification" fact sheet for more information.

Verified Non-GMO

nongmoproject.org

The Non-GMO Project was initiated by the grocery industry to provide independent, third-party verification and labeling of non-GMO (genetically modified organism) food and products. The Non-GMO Project is a non-profit organization that is also involved in consumer education, advocacy, and monitoring GMO crops and ingredients at risk of contaminating the non-GMO supply chain.

Salmon-Safe

salmonsafe.org

The Salmon-Safe label indicates the farm is working to restore water quality and salmon habitat in Pacific Northwest salmon watersheds. The Salmon-Safe Farm Management Certification Program is an independent third-party certifier. In Washington State, the program is coordinated by Stewardship Partners, stewardshippartners.org.

Certified Naturally Grown

naturallygrown.org

This label provides a peer inspection process for farmers who do not use synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or GMO seeds and raise livestock mostly on pasture. It is an independent program not affiliated with the USDA National Organic Program.

Animal Welfare Labels

A related category of labeling concerns the welfare of farm animals, specifically how they were raised, fed, and processed. Some animal welfare or humane-certified programs focus on the care of farm animals

and some advocate for all domestic animals and wildlife. Meat producers may also be interested in becoming certified as following certain religious dietary practices such as Kosher or Halal.

When choosing an animal welfare certification, pay close attention to the definitions and protocols for assessment. For example, grassfed meat and dairy products have established protocols and different organizations offer certification. However, "grass finished" has no legal or regulated definition. The USDA National Agricultural Library Animal Welfare Information Center, nal.usda.gov/awic/, lists information about many animal welfare audit and certification programs online. These are among the top animal welfare claims used today. They are governed by publicly available standards and compliance is verified by a third-party audit.

American Grassfed Association

americangrassfed.org

The verification mark ensures animals have eaten nothing but grass and forage from weaning to harvest, have not been raised in confinement, and have never been fed antibiotics or growth hormones. Originally founded by the Rocky Mountain Farmers Union, The American Grassfed Association is an independent third-party certifier of U.S. raised 100 percent grassfed ruminants, pastured pork, and grassfed dairy.

Certified Humane

certifiedhumane.org

The Certified Humane standards for meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy include a nutritious diet without antibiotics, animals raised with shelter, resting areas, sufficient space, and the ability to engage in natural behaviors. Humane Farm Animal Care is an international certifier dedicated to improving the lives of farm animals in food production from birth through slaughter.

Global Animal Partnership

globalanimalpartnership.org

The Global Animal Partnership (GAP) Animal Welfare 5-Step Rating Program is not a humane certification program, but rather outlines the meaning and process of animal welfare practices, including during transport and slaughter. The verification process results in a rating of 1 to 5+ for beef, broiler chickens, turkey, sheep, pigs, goats, bison, and laying hens. Only steps 4, 5 and 5+ require access to pasture.

Food Justice Labels

Food justice certifiers distinguish their label by including or focusing on the rights of people, especially improving the working conditions of farmworkers and marginalized farmers. The programs featured here are committed to fairness, equity, and environmental stewardship, and are the leaders in their field.

Certified B Corporation

bcorporation.net

B Corporation certification includes an assessment of a company's entire social and environmental performance to measure how a company's operations and business model positively impact workers, community, environment, and customers. Certified B Corporations achieve a minimum score on the impact assessment from a third party. Accountability requirements include building performance standards and stakeholder impact considerations into the legal structure of the business.

Domestic Fair Trade

dfta.org

Headquartered in Seattle, the Domestic Fair Trade Association (DFTA) unites the values of organic agriculture with the worker-rights principles of fair trade in the United States and Canada to "help consumers choose food that is healthy, sustainable and just." The DFTA also evaluates and rates fair-trade labeling programs based on 15 principles.

Fair Trade Certified

transfairusa.org

Based on the idea that the products we buy and sell are connecting to the livelihoods of others, the Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO) oversees global fair-trade claims and the Fair Trade Certified trademark, supporting responsible companies, empowering farmers, workers and fishers, and protecting the environment. The FLO member in the United States is Oakland-based TransFair USA.

Food Justice Certified

agriculturaljusticeproject.org

Providing programs, technical assistance, and standards for third-party verification with the Food Justice Certified label, the Agricultural Justice Project seeks to improve work and trade practices in North America.

Additional Resources

Consumer research

hartman-group.com

Hartman Group is a marketing firm that makes much of their cutting-edge research on consumer perceptions of "organic" and current food trends available free on their website and e-newsletter.

Farmers market glossary of terms

farmersmarketcoalition.org

The Farmers Market Coalition has a glossary of farming, food processing, animal husbandry, and market terms, that are written to help customers, market managers, and farmers speak the same language.

Food Labeling for Dummies: A Definitive Guide to Common Food Terms and Claims

awionline.org/consumers-guide-food-labels-and-animal-welfare

To help make sense of the bewildering range of food claims and terms, Animal Welfare Approved has produced a comprehensive guide that provides definitions for the most commonly used claims and terms for the production, marketing, and labeling of meat, dairy, eggs, and other farmed products.

Glossary of meat production methods

The Sustainable Table has produced a consumer-friendly "Glossary of Meat Production Methods" that highlights the different claims, labels, and certifications being used in marketing meat. sustainabletable.org/Glossary_of_Meat_Production.pdf

USDA grades and standards

ams.usda.gov/grades-standards

Ever wondered what USDA Grade-A means? This rating system and process for use of the USDA shields and grades are developed and maintained by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.



11. Direct Marketing in Washington State

20. Organic Certification