

**BEEF.**  
IT'S WHAT'S FOR DINNER.®

# Decoding the Label

## Know Your Beef Choices

Like the farmers and ranchers who choose how best to raise their cattle for beef, you have choices when it comes to the beef you buy. Cattle are raised responsibly and beef is safe, wholesome and nutritious – but you may see a variety of statements that reflect different production practices on beef packages in your grocery store or on a menu. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) approves these labels for beef based on specific criteria.

### GRAIN-FINISHED

(Most beef is raised this way and likely doesn't have a specific label claim)

This beef comes from cattle that...

- Spend the majority of their lives eating grass or forage
- Spend 4-6 months at a feedyard eating a balanced diet of grains, local feed ingredients, like potato hulls or sugar beets, and hay or forage
- May or may not be given U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved antibiotics to treat, prevent or control disease and/or growth-promoting hormones

### GRASS-FINISHED OR GRASS-FED

This beef comes from cattle that...

- Spend their whole lives eating grass or forage
- May also eat grass, forage, hay or silage at a feedyard
- May or may not be given FDA-approved antibiotics to treat, prevent or control disease and/or growth-promoting hormones

### CERTIFIED ORGANIC

This beef comes from cattle that...

- Never receive any antibiotics or growth-promoting hormones
- May be either grain- or grass-finished, as long as the USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) certifies the feed is 100% organically grown
- May spend time at a feedyard

### "RAISED WITHOUT" CLAIMS

(May be referred to as "never-ever")

This beef comes from cattle that...

- Never receive the compound noted (antibiotics, growth-promoting hormone, etc.)
- May be either grain- or grass-finished
- May spend time at a feedyard

## DID YOU KNOW?



Cattle eat grass for most of their lives.



100% of beef processed in federally inspected packing plants is overseen and inspected by the USDA.



All cattle are commonly fed vitamin and mineral supplements to balance their diet.

You will likely come across other beef labels. For example, USDA labels like "beef raised without antibiotics" (cattle have never received antibiotics but may receive growth-promoting hormones) and "beef raised without hormones" (cattle have never received growth-promoting hormones but may receive antibiotics). All USDA labels must be approved through a formal submission and evaluation process. You might also see other claims on labels, including references to cattle breed, where cattle were raised and cattle welfare.

#### References:

USDA. *FSIS Guidelines on Substantiating Animal-Raising or Environment-Related Labeling Claims*. 2024. [www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media\\_file/documents/FSIS-GD-2024-0006.pdf](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media_file/documents/FSIS-GD-2024-0006.pdf)

USDA. *Understanding Food Quality Labels*. 2024. [www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/AMSPProductLabelFactsheet.pdf](http://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/AMSPProductLabelFactsheet.pdf)



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