

Healthier food purchasing standards



HEALTHIER FOOD » PURCHASING GUIDANCE

Products that carry at least one of the following certifications or label claims are reported as “sustainable.” Local products should be reported solely as “local” unless they carry one of the certifications or label claims. Count the product in each category if it is both local and sustainable.

Allowed label claims

The Department of Agriculture allows the following label claims. Note that no third-party audit is required to use these claims without the Process Verified seal. For this reason we strongly encourage purchasers to review the [Official Listing of Approved USDA Process Verified Programs](#).

- Raised without antibiotics/No antibiotics administered/No antibiotics ever/No antibiotics added (meat and poultry products)
- rBGH-free/rBST-free/Our farmers pledge not to use rBGH (dairy products)

Allowed third-party certifications

We have determined these third-party certifications and label claims to be highly meaningful. However, as the marketplace evolves, you may find new programs available. Use this list of criteria to assess programs not listed here:

- Clearly stated principles and criteria
- Measurable and transparent (publicly available) standards
- Third-party verification
- Improvements to standards as science, technology and markets

General

- [USDA Certified Organic](#) (full spectrum of food and beverages)
- [Food Alliance Certified](#) (beef, lamb, pork, poultry, dairy, eggs, shellfish, grains, legumes, fruit/vegetables, nuts, oils)
- [NON-GMO Project Verified](#) (products containing corn, soy, canola; non-dairy milk)
- [Salmon Safe](#) (fruit, vegetables, wine)
- [Protected Harvest](#) (fruits, vegetables)
- [Rainforest Alliance Certified](#) (coffee/tea, cocoa/chocolate, tropical fruit, nuts, juice)
- [Fair Trade Certified](#) (coffee/tea, cocoa/chocolate, sugar, grains/rice, nuts, fruit, juice, non-dairy milk)
- [Bird Friendly](#) (coffee)

Meat, poultry, and dairy

- [American Grassfed certified](#) (products from ruminants such as beef, dairy, lamb)
- [Animal Welfare Approved](#) by A Greener World (beef, lamb, broiler chicken, turkey, eggs, dairy)
- [Certified Grassfed by A Greener World](#) (beef, dairy, meat and dairy from sheep and goats and bison)
- [Certified Grassfed by Food Alliance](#) (beef, sheep and goats)
- [Certified Responsible Antibiotic Use](#) (broiler chicken, beef, chicken)
- [Certified Humane Raised and Handled](#) (beef, lamb, pork, broiler chicken, turkey, dairy, eggs)
- [Ecological Outcome Verification](#) (beef, pork, bison, sheep, goat, dairy)
- [Global Animal Partnership](#) Steps 1-5+ (beef, broiler chicken, eggs, turkey, pork, bison, sheep, goat)
- [Regenerative Organic Certified](#) (all meat and poultry products)
- [Soil Carbon Index](#) (beef, pork, bison, sheep, goat)

Seafood

- [Marine Stewardship Council](#) (wild and domestic species only)
- [Monterey Bay Aquarium, Seafood Watch*](#), Best Choice List (wild and domestic species only)
- [Gulf of Maine Responsibly Harvested](#) (finfish, shellfish)

Notes: “American Humane Certified,” “Natural,” and “Cage-Free” are NOT allowed claims. Seafood Watch isn’t a certification but criteria-based recommendations, updated quarterly. Refer to [Choosing Seafood for Health Care](#).

Local

Grown/raised and processed within 250 miles of your facility. For processed foods with multiple ingredients, including breads and other bakery items, only products with the majority of ingredients (>50% by weight) grown/raised and processed within the 250-mile radius may be considered local.