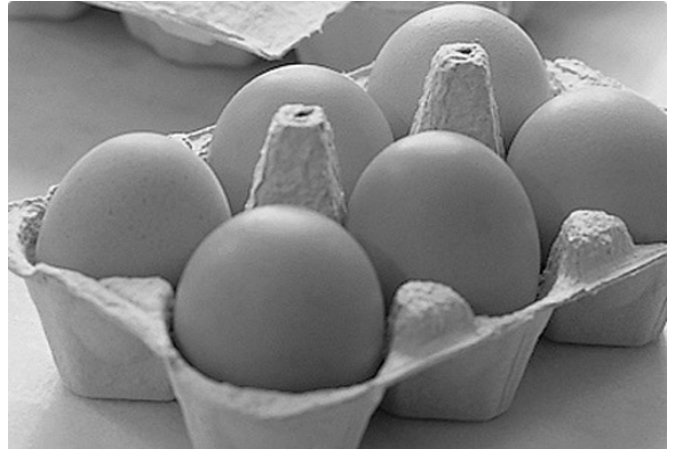


Become an Informed Consumer

Today we are bombarded with many egg choices and faced with egg cartons listing an increasing number of animal production claims. Which claims are meaningful and which ones are simply flashy marketing ploys to sell more eggs?

Common terms found on egg cartons:

Cage-Free: Cage-free eggs are produced by hens that live in barns or buildings, on the floor, not in battery cages. These birds do have freedom of movement and the ability to engage in many of their natural behaviors such as walking, nesting, and spreading their wings. Because the cage-free label is not monitored or regulated by the federal government, cage free facilities vary greatly in terms of flooring, lighting, airflow, nesting facilities and stocking density.



Certified Organic: Only eggs certified by the USDA's National Organic Program are legally permitted to use the term "organic." They are fed an organic, all-vegetarian diet free of antibiotics and pesticides. The birds are uncaged inside barns or houses, and are required to have outdoor access (although there have been concerns about lax enforcement, with some large-scale producers not providing birds meaningful access to the outdoors). Forced molting through starvation is permitted.

Free-Range: "Free-range" or "free-roaming" on a label implies that the bird had unrestricted access to the outside world. In reality, the term only guarantees that the bird has an opportunity to go outdoors each day, with no requirement that it actually gets there. The use of the term "free-range" is only defined by the USDA for chickens that are raised for meat, not those that lay eggs, and thus does not tell the consumer very much about how the hens are raised. Most eggs labeled as "free-roaming" are in fact cage free, meaning the hens are on the floor, not in battery cages.

Natural: USDA has defined the term "natural" for meat and poultry as "a product containing no artificial ingredients or added color and is only minimally processed." Because shell eggs are not processed (except for cleaning and grading) and do not contain artificial ingredients, they would all be considered "natural." Therefore, when applied to eggs, the term "natural" is meaningless and has no relevance to animal welfare.

Egg labels certified by humane organizations:

American Humane Certified (American Humane Association): The hens are raised free from cages although access to the outdoors is not mandatory. Debeaking is permitted. Farms are inspected once per year by certifiers.

Animal Welfare Approved (Animal Welfare Institute): Hens are not raised in cages and daily outdoor access is mandatory. Forced-molting and beak-trimming/debeaking are prohibited. The birds can not be fed animal by-products and antibiotic use is not allowed unless the animals are sick. Farms are inspected once per year by certifiers.

Certified Humane (Humane Farm Animal Care): Cages are prohibited although outdoor access isn't required. There are strict ventilation standards for the houses. Forced-molting and debeaking are prohibited but beak-trimming of young birds is allowed. The birds cannot be fed animal by-products and antibiotic use is prohibited unless the animals are sick. Farms are inspected once per year by certifiers.

For information on additional egg labeling terms, please visit <http://www.foodanimalconcerns.org/humane1.htm>.