



Thanks For Asking – Grocery Labels

THANKS FOR ASKING



What is Meant by Natural, Grass-Fed and Organic Beef?

You may wonder as you peruse the meat cases of local grocery stores what all those labels mean? There are a lot of them, aren't there? One of the questions we most often get is, "What is the definition of Natural, Grass-Fed Beef and Organic Beef?" We'll start with the easier of the three terms by sharing the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) definition on grass-fed beef.

Grass-fed means what it says. Grass-fed animals must be raised and finished, or brought to market-weight, solely on grass, forbs, or cereal grain crops in the vegetative state. No grain or grain byproducts are permitted in the animal's diet.

Next, let's review the terms "organic" and "natural." These words are not interchangeable. It's a common misperception that "natural" and "organic" mean the same thing. However, there are different certification standards. While most organic products are natural, not all-natural products are organic. Before a product can be labeled organic, a government-approved certifier inspects the farm to make sure all rules necessary to meet the USDA's organic standards are being followed. Organic beef comes from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Farmers raising organic cattle must not use any pesticides in the feeds for grain-fed beef. They must also follow non-chemical practices at the farm, such as not spraying any pesticides on the grass.

For grass-fed beef ranchers, the grass fields must also be certified organic before the meat can be. All fresh meat qualifies as "natural" under USDA definition. Natural beef must be free of artificial ingredients, added colors and further processing that would fundamentally alter the product. And if you read further on those meat case labels, you will find both the USDA definition as well as how the brand further defines the term natural. At Nicholas Meat, this definition also includes that the animal was never given antibiotics or added growth hormones.

As a smaller, regional plant, Nicholas Meat provides a valuable service to both local farmers and consumers as the processor and supplier of natural, grass-fed, and organic beef products. John Painter, an organic dairy and beef farmer from Westfield, PA, has shipped his cattle to Nicholas Meat for eight years. It is a market he says he cannot consistently find anywhere else in the area. "It's so important to me and other farmers to have this plant available to us to harvest our beef," says Painter. "Consumer interest in organic beef is strong and we depend on Nicholas Meat to purchase and process our beef safely and consistently, and then get it to customers who prefer organic beef from family farms like ours."

Do you have a question we can answer? Send us an email at info@nicholasmeats.com. We look forward to seeing your questions and thanks for asking!

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