

# NFM's Go-to guide for food labels

**Confused about what they mean? Here's what you need to know to help guide your customers**

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## USDA Certified Organic

**What it means:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture developed standards that must be met by producers using this label in the United States. Organic food is produced without the use of synthetic and petroleum-derived pesticides and fertilizers, antibiotics, genetic engineering and irradiation. Organic animals must also eat 100 percent organic feed and have access to pasture; processed foods carrying this label must have between 95 percent and 100 percent organic ingredients.

**Where you'll find it:** Beverages, bread, candy, cereals, dairy products, frozen foods, fruit, grains, meat, nuts, oils, processed food, snacks, soups and vegetables.

**How it's verified:** A USDA-accredited certifier verifies that farmers and producers meet the USDA National Organic Program standards.



## Certified Naturally Grown

**What it means:** An alternative to the USDA's organic program, CNG is a nonprofit certification program for small-scale, direct-market organic farmers. The CNG certification uses National Organic Program growing practices; the primary difference is certification costs to farmers and paperwork requirements. Since CNG certified farmers must agree to sell their product only locally and directly to food stores and restaurants, it's considered a nationally branded local foods label.

**Where you'll find it:** Fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, eggs, and some jam.

**How it's verified:** The CNG program uses other organic or CNG farmers as inspectors, and they randomly test 10 percent of members' products for pesticide residues.



## Protected Harvest

**What it means:** Affiliated with the World Wildlife Fund, the Protected Harvest program certifies crops that have been raised with integrated pest management. To qualify for the seal, specific crop management practices must be employed that reduce use of toxic pesticides,

improve soil and water quality, and protect wildlife habitat.

**Where you'll find it:** Fruit, vegetables and wine.

**How it's verified:** By contracted, independent, third-party inspectors.



## Fair Trade Certified

**What it means:** Internationally used, this label concerns crops from developing nations and indicates that one or more ingredients were sourced from either democratically organized cooperatives of small-scale farmers or from plantations that provide improved labor conditions and wages, and a role for unions. A strict set of standards ensure small-farmers receive a fair price for their product and workers a fair wage for their labor. Both farmer co-ops and plantations must have direct trade relations with buyers & access to credit.

**Where you'll find it:** Coffee, hot chocolate, tea, candy, cocoa, fruit, grains and sweeteners.

**How it's verified:** TransFair USA, a nonprofit organization, is the only certifier of Fair Trade goods in the United States.



## Demeter Certified Biodynamic

**What it means:** This label predates the modern organic agriculture movement, but similar to the USDA organic label, it indicates that a product was produced without the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers and animal by-products. Demeter also prohibits the use of genetic engineering, and stipulates all feed must be grown on-site, and that the entire farm has to be sustainable.

**Where you'll find it:** Wine, cheese, eggs, fruit, meat and vegetables.

**How it's verified:** By a third-party auditor.



## Certified Humane Raised and Handled

**What it means:** This label ensures that animals raised for dairy, lamb, poultry, beef, goat and pork products are treated humanely. Growth hormones are prohibited, as are antibiotics (except in the treatment of sick animals). Access to clean and sufficient food and water and a safe, healthful living environment is required from birth through slaughter. Standards for each species define these requirements specifically. For example, dairy cattle must have at least four to five hours a day of pasture time every day, weather permitting.

**Where you'll find it:** Meat, dairy and egg products.



## Dolphin Safe

**What it means:** The Dolphin Protection Consumer Information Act prohibits manufacturers from labeling tuna as "dolphin safe" if it was caught in a manner that causes death or serious injury to dolphins through deliberate targeting or encirclement of dolphins.

**Where you'll find it:** Tuna.

**How it's verified:** Tuna caught in the primary ocean region where tuna swim with dolphins must be verified by an independent observer from the National Marine Fisheries Service who was aboard the ship that caught the tuna (and who ensures that no dolphins were deliberately encircled). Tuna caught in most other waters does not require onboard verification.



## Rainforest Alliance Certified

**What it means:** The Rainforest Alliance follows standards set by the Sustainable Agriculture Network, designed to promote tropical conservation internationally. RA focuses on educating farmers about alternatives to destructive farming methods and verifies that certified products have been grown using environmentally responsible management practices, including integrated pest- and disease-management practices, soil and water conservation, fair labor practices and good community relations.

**Where you'll find it:** Coffee, chocolate and bananas.

**How it's verified:** By third-party auditors.



## Bird Friendly

**What it means:** When conservation groups noticed farmers ripping out shade trees that grew alongside coffee trees, disrupting wildlife and endangering birds, they took action. Coffee bearing this label must be grown under naturally occurring or planted shade trees.

**Where you'll find it:** Coffee.

**How it's verified:** The Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center certifies bird-friendly coffee on 33 farms in seven countries. ■

Source: Kimberly Lord Stewart, author of *Eating Between the Lines: The Supermarket Shopper's Guide to the Truth Behind Food Labels* (St. Martin's Griffin, 2007).