

PICKING THE GOOD EGG!

Behind the Labels of "Ethical" Animal Products

Free-run, free-range, Born-3, grain-fed, non-medicated? The labels all sound good, but are the animals treated better on these farms? How would you know? Here is a guide to what's behind the labels.

There are no laws outlining the minimum requirements for animal welfare on conventional farms regarding space allowance, access to bedding, allowable castration methods and so on. Farmers follow voluntary national recommended codes of practice for the raising of food animals and their products

(i.e., milk, eggs, etc.). These codes are modelled on maximizing production to produce inexpensive, "safe" food and are largely written by the industry.

Most farmers follow these codes; however, the organic movement and most humane organizations believe the recommended practices fall far short of providing proper welfare for farm animals. Therefore, the BC SPCA and the organic industry have created animal-welfare standards that go beyond conventional practice and have labelled their products accordingly.



GREEN LIGHT! – CHOOSE A CERTIFIED LABEL!

Ignore marketing claims like "country fresh" (which have no approval from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency) and look for "certification" on the label. A product with an "SPCA Certified" label comes from a farm that follows prescribed standards of animal welfare, is assessed annually by a trained inspector, and third-party, independent reviewers approve the inspection report. All "certified" labels on packaging are approved by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

SPCA Certified – Animals from these farms have been raised within high standards of animal welfare developed by an expert panel of animal-welfare researchers, veterinarians and farmers in consultation with the BC SPCA. SPCA Certified animals may be raised as either free-run or free-range (see middle column). Each year the farmer must be re-certified and there are random inspections to ensure compliance.



Certified Organic – Certified organic standards include a number of animal-welfare provisions in addition to chemical-free production. All certified organic animals are also raised as free-range (see next column). In B.C. supermarkets, the most common certified organic labels are:

- **COABC** (Certified Organic Associations of British Columbia);
- **QAI** (Quality Assurance International);
- **ProCert**;
- **Canada Organic** (A new, federally regulated national organic program overseen by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency).



YELLOW LIGHT – NEXT BEST BET TO CERTIFIED PRODUCTS

Although not backed up by certification, some product labelling suggests that animals have been raised in a more humane manner. Farms under these labels can provide very high levels of welfare, if managed well. However, if they have not been certified, then they have not been inspected, which means you cannot be sure that standards are met.

Free-run – This wording is found mostly on eggs. Chickens that produce these eggs are raised free of cages and are kept entirely indoors. While these animals have no access to the outdoors, they are protected from external threats, such as predators and parasites. *Note: All chicken in B.C. is raised free-run, unless it is labelled as "free range" or "organic." In other words, "free-run" is nothing special.*

Free-range – These animals are raised free of cages or other types of confinement and are

provided with access to the outdoors, weather permitting. However, the outdoor area does not guarantee pasture for grazing or foraging. This wording will be found mostly on eggs, chicken and sometimes pork.

Pasture-raised – Some farms differentiate their products from Free-Range by providing animals access to pasture, allowing them to graze or forage – presumably for most of their lives. This wording can be found on eggs, chicken, beef and pork.

RED LIGHT – BE CAREFUL, YOU MAY BE MISLED

Don't be fooled by any claims that vaguely imply animal welfare benefits. Inspection and certification to advanced animal-welfare standards has not occurred. In many cases, these claims do not at all refer to how an animal was raised.

Animal-friendly – This claim does not guarantee that animals were raised humanely.

Fresh and Natural (Naturally Raised) – These claims have no real meaning regarding the methods used to raise the animals or the actual quality of the products. The term "fresh," for example, is not permitted on egg cartons. Natural can only be used on meat, poultry and fish products if it can be proven that the animals were raised with little help from humans.

Non-Medicated – These animals may have been exposed to absolutely no pharmaceutical drugs (e.g. antibiotics) over the course of their

lives, or they may have just been fed non-medicated feed, but this claim gives no indication of how the animals were raised.

Maple Leaf Prime Naturally – Animals on these farms are raised in the same manner as other conventional farms. The company markets its product based on food safety and feed requirements and not on any special treatment of the animals.

Born-3 – These eggs come from conventionally raised, caged hens that have been fed a unique diet that modifies the fat in the egg yolk.

Vegetable-fed or Grain-fed – Many farm animals are fed meat byproducts as a protein or fat source. These label claims do not specify if the animals' feed contains veterinary drugs or preservatives. Unless a statement like "no animal byproducts" follows the term, there can be no assurance that the feed contains only grains. There is no indication of how the animals were raised outside of what they were fed.



SPCA CERTIFIED FARMS

The BC SPCA created the SPCA Certified program to demonstrate that farms can provide animals high welfare standards and be commercially viable. Our aim is to have more conventional farms convert to practices that provide better lives for farm animals. To date, across B.C. and Alberta, there are 20 farms producing eggs, dairy, beef, pork and chicken that are SPCA Certified:

Beef: Celistas Springs Ranch (Shuswap) / Painted River Farms (Lower Mainland) / Vale Farms (North Okanagan) / Dally Ranch (North Okanagan) / Jerseyland Organics (Boundary) / First Nature Farms (Alberta)

Dairy: Little Qualicum Cheeseworks (Vancouver Island) / Jerseyland Organics (Boundary)

Chicken: Maple Hills (Fraser Valley) / Rockweld Farms (Fraser Valley) / Vale Farms (North Okanagan) / Sunworks Farm (Alberta) / First Nature Farms (Alberta)

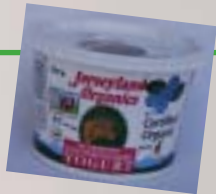
Eggs: Rabbit River Farms (Lower Mainland) / Sunworks Farm (Alberta) / Second Nature Farm (Fraser Valley) / Rockweld Farms (Fraser Valley)

Pork: First Nature Farms (Alberta) / Celistas Springs Ranch (Shuswap) / Sunworks Farm (Alberta)

Where to buy SPCA Certified products: Capers Community Markets • Small Potatoes Urban Delivery • Choices Markets • Stongs Market • Famous Foods • Thrifty Foods • IGA • Whole Foods • Save On Foods/Price Smart

Regional Locations: The Organic Grocer (Surrey) • Island Natural (Victoria) • Quality Foods (Vancouver Island) • Ave Maria (Prince George) • Nature's Fare (Thompson/Okanagan)

Visit www.sPCA.bc.ca/farm for more info on SPCA Certified.



ARE BROWN EGGS BETTER?
The colour of a chicken's egg is no indication of whether it is healthier or laid by a chicken raised more humanely. Egg colour is determined primarily by the breed of chicken that lays the egg – generally speaking, brown chickens lay brown eggs.

Unless the eggs are "certified" most brown eggs found in grocery stores come from hens raised in cages.