



NATURAL

WHAT DOES THE TERM “NATURAL” MEAN?

The USDA regulates the use of the term “natural” on meat products and according to USDA regulations, the term “natural” may be used on labeling for meat products if it meets the following guidelines:

- The product does not contain artificial ingredients, coloring ingredients, or chemical preservatives; and
- The product is minimally processed.

According to the USDA, all natural products should include a brief statement on the product label that explains what is meant by the term “natural” (i.e., that the product is natural **because** it contains no artificial ingredients and is only minimally processed). This statement should appear directly beneath or beside all natural claims (or, if elsewhere, an asterisk should be used to tie the explanation to the claim).

Looking for more information?

If you're curious about what other labels you might find on packages of chicken meat, check out this [infographic on common chicken labeling terms](#).

ROOST ROSTER

A glossary of chicken meat and food label terminology

The U.S. Department of Agriculture regulates and oversees the language on meat and poultry labels. Here are some terms commonly found on chicken packaging.

- All-Vegetable or Vegetarian Diet**
Must poultry feed is made from corn and soybean meal, but sometimes also contains meat and poultry by-products, which are excellent sources of healthy vitamins, minerals and proteins. If the feed does not contain any of these products, it can be labeled "All-Vegetarian Diet" or "Vegetarian Diet."
- Antibiotics Claims**
All chicken you buy is technically "antibiotic-free" — federal rules state that if any antibiotics are required, they must have cleared the bird's system before they can leave the farm. Some chickens are raised without the use of antibiotics. In the store, these chicken packages may be labeled a number of different ways, including "No Antibiotics Ever," "Raised Without Antibiotics," or "natural."
- Cage Free**
Birds are raised in large, open pens. In all chicken you buy from a store is raised cage-free, whether it's labeled "cage-free" or not.
- Broiler**
A broiler chicken is raised for meat. This is the most common found in your grocery.
- Cornish Hen**
A small broiler chicken harvested at a young age. It is not a game bird (which is a bird hunted for sport or food).
- Dark Meat**
The back half of the chicken, the legs (drumsticks) and thighs.
- Enhanced**
A chicken product has been "enhanced" if it contains an added ingredient or ingredients for flavor, which typically include water, salt, sugar, chicken broth or seasonings, like garlic. If a product is enhanced, it must clearly say so on the front of the package, along with a list of every ingredient and how much of it was used.
- Farm-Raised**
All chickens raised in the U.S. are farm-raised, in spacious barns equipped with temperature controls, clean feeding and water systems, and protection from any predators or extreme elements that could affect the health of the chickens.
- Free-Range**
Generally, "free-range" is included on a label when the chicken has access to the outdoors. Not all free-range chicken is organic, but all organic chickens are free-range.
- Fresh**
"Fresh" means the temperature of whole poultry and cuts have never fallen below 32°F (the temperature at which water freezes, unlike water).
- Hatched, Raised and Processed in the USA**
More than 99% of chicken sold in the U.S. comes from chickens hatched, raised and processed in the U.S. The only exception is a very small amount imported from Chile and Canada, which have food safety and quality standards equal to our own.
- Natural**
Under USDA regulations, a "natural" product has no artificial ingredients, coloring ingredients or chemical preservatives, and is minimally processed.
- No Added Hormones or Steroids**
Despite this label appearing on many chicken products found in the store, no chicken you buy is ever given added hormones or steroids. In fact, the use of such added or artificial hormones is forbidden by law by the FDA and this must be noted on the label.
- Organic**
Products carrying the "100% Certified Organic" and (regulated by USDA) mean the chicken has been fed only certified organic feed (corn and soybeans). The chicken is also free antibiotics — though it may have been vaccinated against common diseases. Most of these processing practices are the same for, and consequently, the Organic food label does not indicate that the product's safety, quality or nutritional attributes are any higher than the conventionally raised product.
- Pasture-Raised**
Chickens that are primarily raised outdoors on pasture.
- Retained Water**
A "retained water" statement, such as "May contain up to 4% retained water" or "Less than 4% retained water" is often found on packages of fresh poultry. USDA does not allow retention of moisture in essential safety procedures, such as chilling, to ensure chickens in ice-cold water to keep them cool and slow the growth of any spoilage bacteria. If any moisture is retained by the chicken after these steps, it must be stated on the label.
- Roaster**
A larger chicken of 5.5 lbs. or more, and less than 12 weeks of age.
- USDA Processed Verified**
Companies with approved USDA Process Verified Programs are able to make marketing claims associated with their process verified points such as age, source, feeding practices, or other raising and processing claims and market themselves as "USDA Process Verified." Poultry's verified means that a company has been evaluated and verified by the USDA in these areas.
- White Meat**
The breast, tender and wing of the chicken.