United States Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service

Food Safety Information

USDA Photo

Meat and Poultry Labeling Terms

"What does `mechanically separated meat or poultry' mean?"
"If chicken is labeled 'fresh,' how can it be so rock hard?"
"Does 'natural' mean 'raised without hormones'?"

These are just some of the questions consumers have asked USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline about words which may be descriptive of meat and poultry. Can they be legally used on labels and, if so what are their definitions?

Here from USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is a glossary of meat and poultry labeling terms. FSIS is the agency responsible for ensuring the truthfulness and accuracy in labeling of meat and poultry products. Knowing the meaning of labeling terms can make purchasing of meat and poultry products less confusing.

Basted or Self Basted

Bone-in poultry products that are injected or marinated with a solution containing butter or other edible fat, broth, stock or water plus spices, flavor enhancers and other approved substances must be labeled as basted or self basted. The maximum added weight of approximately 3% solution before processing is included in the net weight on the label. Label must include a statement identifying the total quantity and common or usual name of all ingredients in the solution, e.g., "Injected with approximately 3% of a solution of _____ (list of ingredients)."

Use of the terms "basted" or "self-basted" on boneless poultry products is limited to 8% of the weight of the raw poultry before processing.

Certified

The term "certified" implies that the USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service and the Agriculture Marketing Service have officially evaluated a meat product for class, grade, or other quality characteristics (e.g., "Certified Angus Beef"). When used under other circumstances, the term must be closely associated with the name of the organization responsible for the "certification" process, e.g., "XYZ Company's Certified Beef."

Chemical Free

The term is **not allowed** to be used on a label.

Free Range or Free Roaming

Producers must demonstrate to the Agency that the poultry has been allowed access to the outside.

Fresh Poultry

"Fresh" means whole poultry and cuts have never been below 26 °F (the temperature at which poultry freezes). This is consistent with consumer expectations of "fresh" poultry, i.e., not hard to the touch or frozen solid.

Fresh Poultry, continued

In 1997, FSIS began enforcing a final rule prohibiting the use of the term "fresh" on the labeling of raw poultry products whose internal temperature has ever been below 26 °F.

The temperature of individual packages of raw poultry products labeled "fresh" can vary as much as 1 °F below 26 °F within inspected establishments or 2 °F below 26 °F in commerce.

Fresh poultry should always bear a "keep refrigerated" statement.

Frozen Poultry

Temperature of raw, frozen poultry is 0 °F or below.

Fryer-Roaster Turkey

Young, immature turkey usually less than 16 weeks of age of either sex.

Halal and Zabiah Halal

Products prepared by federally inspected meat packing plants identified with labels bearing references to "Halal" or "Zabiah Halal" must be handled according to Islamic law and under Islamic authority.

Hen or Tom Turkey

The sex designation of "hen" (female) or "tom" (male) turkey is optional on the label, and is an indication of size rather than the tenderness of a turkey.

Kosher

"Kosher" may be used only on the labels of meat and poultry products prepared under rabbinical supervision.

"Meat" Derived by Advance Meat/Bone Separation and Meat Recovery Systems

The definition of "meat" was amended in December 1994 to include as "meat" product derived from advanced meat/bone separation machinery which is comparable in appearance, texture and composition to meat trimmings and similar meat products derived by hand. Product produced by advanced meat recovery (AMR) machinery can be labeled using terms associated with hand-deboned product, e.g., "beef" or "pork" trimmings and ground "beef" or "pork." The AMR machinery cannot grind, crush or pulverize bones to remove edible meat tissue and bones must emerge essentially intact. The meat produced in this manner can contain no more than 150 milligrams of calcium per 100 grams product. Products that exceed the calcium content limit must be labeled "mechanically separated beef or pork."

Mechanically Separated Meat

Mechanically separated meat is a paste-like and batter-like meat product produced by forcing bones with attached edible meat under high pressure through a sieve or similar device to separate the bone from the edible meat tissue. In 1982, a final rule published by FSIS on mechanically separated meat said it was safe and established a standard of identity for the food product. Some restrictions were made on how much can be used and the type of products in which it can be used. These restrictions were based on concerns for limited intake of certain components in MSM, like calcium. Due to FSIS regulations enacted in 2004 to protect consumers against Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, mechanically separated beef is considered inedible and is prohibited for use as human food. However, mechanically separated pork is permitted and must be labeled as "mechanically separated pork" in the ingredients statement.

Mechanically Separated Poultry

Mechanically separated poultry is a paste-like and batter-like poultry product produced by forcing bones with attached edible tissue through a sieve or similar device under high pressure to separate bone from the edible tissue. Mechanically separated poultry has been used in poultry products since 1969. In 1995, a final rule on mechanically separated poultry said it would be used without restrictions. However, it must be labeled as "mechanically separated chicken or mechanically separated turkey" (depending upon the kind of poultry used) in the ingredients statement. The final rule became effective November 4, 1996.

Meat and Poultry Labeling Terms

Natural	A product containing no artificial ingredient or added color and is only minimally processed. Minimal processing means that the product was processed in a manner that does not fundamentally alter the product. The label must include a statement explaining the meaning of the term natural (such as "no artificial ingredients; minimally processed").
No Hormones (pork or poultry)	***Hormones are not allowed in raising hogs or poultry.*** Therefore, the claim "no hormones added" **cannot be used** on the labels of pork or poultry unless it is followed by a statement that says "Federal regulations prohibit the use of hormones."
No Hormones (beef)	The term "no hormones administered" may be approved for use on the label of beef products if sufficient documentation is provided to the Agency by the producer showing no hormones have been used in raising the animals.
No Antibiotics (red meat and poultry)	The terms "no antibiotics added" may be used on labels for meat or poultry products if sufficient documentation is provided by the producer to the Agency demonstrating that the animals were raised without antibiotics.
Organic	For information about the National Organic Program and use of the term "organic" on labels, refer to these factsheets from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service: • Organic Food Standards and Labels: The Facts • Labeling and Marketing Information
Oven Prepared	Product is fully cooked and ready to eat.
Young Turkey	Turkeys of either sex that are less than 8 months of age according to present regulations.

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)** The hotline is open year-round

Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at **www.fsis.usda.gov**.

Send E-mail questions to **MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov**.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7 and a live chat during Hotline hours.

AskKaren.gov

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