

# BEEF LABELLING



## BACKGROUND

Beef production in Canada is diverse in terms of region, landscape, management practices and goals. The labels displayed on beef products are becoming equally as diverse, potentially leading to uncertainty for the consumer. Claims on labels do not indicate that a product is superior **in terms of quality or health benefits**. They are primarily used to indicate certain aspects of how the animal was raised. Fortunately, beef production and management practices are highly regulated in Canada, ensuring consumers are purchasing a safe and healthy product regardless of how the beef was raised.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Beef production and management practices are regulated to ensure Canadians are consuming a safe and healthy product no matter how it was raised.
- Labels are essential for marketing and informational purposes. While Canadian food and drug laws require truthful and accurate labelling, some labels can be confusing and misleading. Being an informed consumer means being aware of the meaning of different labels.
- Beef labelling may allow producers to market their products by highlighting (a) key management practice(s) consumers may be interested in.
- Labels such as “organic” or “natural” or “grass-fed” do not make a certain beef product better than another or healthier for you. These labels simply indicate certain aspects of how the animal was raised.
- Beef labelling can also be used to display recommended cooking method in order to improve the eating experience. For example, ‘Outside Round Marinating Steak’ suggests the steak should be marinated.

## CONVENTIONALLY RAISED BEEF

- In Canada, to be conventionally raised means to be grain-finished. Types of grain fed to cattle in Canada include barley, wheat and corn. Feeding grain contributes to well-marbled, flavourful, and tender beef with firm, white-coloured fat.
- Conventionally raising cattle also typically involves using growth technologies to improve weight gain and feed efficiency, reducing resource use and greenhouse gas emissions.
- The vast majority of beef raised in Canada is grain-finished, which allows for processing at 2 years of age or less. Finishing at a younger age directly correlates with tenderness and overall eating quality<sup>1</sup>.
- All cattle are raised on grass before the finishing stage.
- The combination of raising cattle on grass and finishing them on grain allows us to produce a year-round supply of beef that is accessible to Canadians while using less land, water, and emitting fewer greenhouse gases - putting Canadian beef producers among the most efficient in the world.



# DIFFERENT TYPES OF LABELS



## CANADIAN BEEF



- People want to know where their food comes from and the Canadian beef logo is a key identifier to help with that.
- Canadian Beef is the brand that Canada Beef, as an organization, globally positions, markets and creates demand for beef from Canada in an effort to support the Canadian beef industry.

## CERTIFIED SUSTAINABLE



- The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) oversees the certification and sourcing of Canadian beef that has been raised according to standards across five areas of sustainability, (natural resources, supporting people and communities, animal health and welfare, food, and efficiency and innovation)<sup>2</sup>.
- CRSB Certified recognizes sustainable practices used by beef producers and processors, supports the supply chain to source sustainably raised products, and builds consumer confidence in how beef is raised in Canada, backed by an independent, science-based verification system<sup>2</sup>.
- Independent Certification Bodies certify farms, ranches and processors to the CRSB's Sustainability Standards, and audit the systems used to track the cattle and beef from CRSB Certified Operations through the chain<sup>2</sup>.

- Certification is maintained by upholding a 5-year audit cycle to ensure adherence to the Sustainable Beef Production and Processing Standard and measurable improvements<sup>2</sup>.

## CERTIFIED ORGANIC BEEF



- Organically raised beef means that the cattle were raised without the use of antibiotics, growth promotants or feed additives and the feed consumed throughout the cattle's lifetimes were not grown with synthetic fertilizers or pesticides<sup>3</sup>.
- In order to be certified organic, beef producers must adhere to the standards and guidelines set out by the Canadian Organic Standard, in addition to the meat processing standards set out by Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). If produced in accordance with the Standard, beef products may bear the Canadian organic logo<sup>4</sup>.

## 'FREE FROM'

- This is a term often used when marketing products that do not contain one or more attributes. In the case of beef, this usually refers to certain production practices and could mean the absence of growth promoting implants, antibiotics or feed additives.
- These labels can take various forms but will generally say what the product is free from, or in other words, was raised without.
- These labels are not regulated but may be useful for consumers who

wish to avoid a certain production practice or attribute.

## NATURAL BEEF

- The CFIA regulates the use of the terms "nature", "natural", "mother nature" and "nature's way" when labelling products in the Guide to Food Labelling and Advertising<sup>5</sup>.
- These terms can be misleading when used in marketing and advertising. Consumers tend to believe that products described as "natural" have value or more healthfulness than those that do not bear this description.
- In the USA, the definition of "natural" varies among different brands and programs. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) generally described natural products as 'minimally processed with no additives.'

## GRASS-FED BEEF

- The USDA has grass-fed standards that state "the diet shall be derived from forage and animals cannot be fed grain or grain by-products and must have continuous access to pasture during the growing season. With the exception of milk (consumed prior to weaning), grass and/or forage shall be the feed source consumed for the lifetime of the ruminant animal."
- The CFIA does not have any regulation surrounding grass-fed beef but do have specific claims for food and regulate feed.

1. The Canadian Beef Advantage (<https://canadabeef.ca/canadian-beef-advantage/>) (Accessed January 26, 2024)

2. CRSB Certified (<https://www.crsbcertified.ca/about/>) (Accessed January 26, 2024).

3. Understanding the Difference in Organic and Other Beef. Canada Beef fact sheet, 2016. ([https://canadabeef.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/3208\\_CANBEEF\\_factsheet\\_ORGANIC-2016.pdf](https://canadabeef.wpenginepowered.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/3208_CANBEEF_factsheet_ORGANIC-2016.pdf)) (Accessed January 26, 2024)

4. The Canadian Logo, August 10, 2021. Organic Federation of Canada (<https://organicfederation.ca/resource/organic-production-in-canada/the-canadian-logo/>) (Accessed January 26, 2024)

5. Method of production claims on food labels. Canadian Food Inspection Agency. <https://inspection.canada.ca/food-labels/labelling/industry/method-of-production-claims/eng/1633011251044/1633011867095#s3c8> (Accessed January 26, 2024)