

CHEAT SHEET MEAT AND FISH

Buying better meat and seafood can feel like stepping through a mine-field. But here is a guide to help you navigate it.

ORGANIC OR GRASS FED - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Organic meat comes from animals raised without the use of chemicals, pesticides, herbicides, hormones or antibiotics. Organic meat can come from grain-fed sources, as long as the feed is certified organic.

Grass fed meats are raised eating grass from natural pastures. Some grass fed meats have been 'grain finished' which means due to a variety of reasons, such as drought or seasonal impacts on pastures, the animals have been given grain-based feeds in the last part of their lives.

Buying the best quality meat your family can afford is the best way to choose what kinds of meats to buy. Ask your butcher for information about where the meat has come from and how it was produced to make an informed decision. My preference is to buy meat from sources as local as possible that has been raised in a natural and humane way.

LABEL DESCRIPTIONS

FREE RANGE

This term is used in relation to pork and chicken. It means that pigs and chickens are not kept in sow stalls/cages, and that they have access to the outdoors, but rules about stocking density and the amount of time they need to spend outside to qualify for this label means that they could still be living in cramped conditions for most of their day.

Free-range animals could still be given antibiotics.

Depending on the country of origin, animals could still be given hormones (Australia has not allowed use of hormones in poultry farming since the 1960s)

Free-range animals could still be fed genetically modified grains (GMOs – see below).

ORGANIC

Has been certified through a certification body.

The property is organic – no pesticides used on the grass or grains that the animals might be eating.

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This is not a guarantee of grass-fed meat. For cattle and sheep, this could mean that they were fed grain (albeit organic grain), which is not suited to their digestive systems. Pigs and chickens would have been fed organic, non-GMO grain.

GRASS-FED

- Doesn't necessarily mean organic certified
- Does mean the animals have been pasture fed
- Can be tricky to know if they have been 'grain-finished' though. Because 'grass-fed' on a label just means starting out in life. It can still mean they are fed grains for up to ninety days towards the end of their lives.

This is only a concern for cows and sheep. They don't have the digestive set-up to process grains efficiently or well. They're ruminants - they eat grass. Pigs and chickens can safely have grains in their diet, but choose organic pork and chicken so that you know the grain they were fed was organic and not genetically modified feed.

YOUR GUIDE TO CHOOSING THE BEST

These are the "gold standard" labels you want to look for. But as always, go for small steps. Do the best you can with what you have available to you and what your budget will allow. Buying cheaper cuts like stewing cuts and mince, or buying whole chickens rather than fillets will help you stretch your meat budget further and allow you to afford better quality, as will using meat in smaller amounts in your meals.

BEEF AND LAMB

Grass-fed and Grass-finished.

Organic grass-fed and grass-finished is even better.

CHICKEN AND PORK

Organic and free-range.

EGGS

Organic pasture-raised

This article by Alexx Stuart has some great explanations of different labels so that you know what to look for, and also includes some tips on how to make good meat more affordable. <https://www.1millionwomen.com.au/blog/guide-our-be-responsible-omnivore/>

ISSUES OF CONCERN

GMOS

Whatever the animals eat, we eat. We need to care about the craziness going on with genetically modified crops.

Here is a good basic [summary](#).

Alexx Stuart suggests watching [Planet on a Plate](#).

NITRATES

In bacon, salami, ham, cured meats be more concerned with preservatives, including potassium sorbates and 202, 220, 223 - things that cause asthma, wheezing, eczema, dermatitis.

For the best article about nitrates [read Chris Kresser](#) on the nitrate myth and why not to fear bacon.

FISH

Do not buy prawns or fish from Asia – there are many dubious aquaculture practices that are not declared.

Best choice in Australia is West Coast fish.

Best choice is Queensland prawns.

Buy local, not imported - wild caught, line caught fish.

Be wary of farmed salmon (have often been fed pellets that contain GMO soy – NOT a fish food!). Atlantic Salmon from Australian waters is farmed salmon.

Look for wild caught salmon – but it is very expensive and has big food miles as it comes from the northern hemisphere.

Tinned fish from the supermarket – sardines and mackerel are great sources of Omega 3s. Brands Fish 4 Ever, Good Fish and King Oscar are good choices.