



The **Consumers Union** Guide to **Environmental Labels**



Food Alliance (FA)

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LABEL REPORT CARD						
How meaningful is the label?	Is the label verified?	Is the meaning of the label consistent?	Are the label standards publicly available?	Is information about the organization publicly available?	Is the organization free from conflict of interest?	Was the label developed with broad public and industry input?
Highly	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

LABEL CATEGORY:

[Pest Management](#), [Social Responsibility](#), [Sustainable Agriculture](#), [Animal Welfare](#)

WHERE YOU'LL FIND THIS LABEL:

FOOD

- **CANNED FOODS** : fruits, vegetables
- **DAIRY PRODUCTS** : cheese, milk, misc. dairy products
- **FROZEN FOODS** : frozen food, fruits, vegetables
- **FRUIT** : apples, bananas, berries - other, blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, cherries, citrus, cranberries, currants, figs, gooseberries, grapefruit, grapes - table, loganberries, marionberries, melons, nectarines, oranges, peaches, pears, raspberries, rhubarb, strawberries, tayberries, watermelon
- **GRAINS** : barley, canola, rapeseed, wheat
- **LEGUMES** : beans, lentils
- **MEAT** : beef, bison, lamb, pork, poultry
- **NUTS** : chestnuts, hazelnut
- **OILS** : canola oil
- **VEGETABLES** : artichokes, asparagus, basil, beans, beets, bok choy, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, chard, chives, cilantro, collards, corn (fresh), corn (sweet), cucumber, eggplant, garlic, kale, kohlrabi, leeks, lentils, lettuce, mixed vegetables, mushrooms, mustard seed, onions, parsley, parsnips, peas, peppers - bell, peppers - hot, potatoes, pumpkins, radishes, red chard, rhubarb, rutabaga, scallions, spinach, squash, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, turnips, zucchini

WHAT THIS LABEL MEANS:

Food Alliance (FA) is a coalition of farmers, consumers, scientists, grocers, processors, distributors, farm worker representatives and environmentalists that certifies farmers for sustainable agriculture practices. To earn FA certification, farms and ranches must meet

standards for providing safe and fair working conditions; ensuring healthy and humane care for livestock; not adding hormones or non-therapeutic antibiotics; not genetically modifying crops or livestock; reducing pesticide use and toxicity; conserving soil and water resources; and protecting wildlife habitat. Farmers are required to set goals for continual improvement and sign an affidavit that [genetically engineered](#) crops are not used.

Food handling facilities must meet a related set of standards, including using Food Alliance certified ingredients; providing safe and fair working conditions; conserving energy and water use; reducing the use of toxic and hazardous materials; reducing and recycling solid waste; not using artificial flavors, colors, or preservatives; ensuring quality control and food handling safety; planning for continuous improvement.

FA assesses "Whole Farm" standards against conservation and human resource issues and "Product Specific" standards against a host of different standards specific to the crop in question. The whole farm evaluations and the specific crop evaluations are based on a point system where a score of at least 75% (of the maximum points) is necessary for FA certification. All farms must meet fixed standards, including not using genetically modified seed varieties or livestock breeds; not using hormones or nontherapeutic antibiotics in livestock production; continual improvement of management and production practices; not using high toxicity, prohibited pesticides.

Food Alliance also forms partnerships with retailers. This is not a certification program but rather a way to promote FA products in the marketplace. Retailers pay a licensing fee for FA logo usage and can purchase merchandise for FA promotion.

WHO VERIFIES THIS LABEL?

Food Alliance certification involves a third-party site inspection that is conducted by International Certification Services, an ISO 65 accredited inspection agency that has been providing organic and other certifications since 1979. Farms and ranches are inspected every three years, but must submit annual reports on changes to their management practices or on-farm conditions. Food handling facilities are inspected annually.

CONSUMERS UNION EVALUATION:

The Food Alliance label is a highly meaningful label. The FA label has five main standard areas. The pest management and soil/water conservation guidelines were developed through an outside consultant. The pest management guidelines include a list of more than a dozen prohibited pesticides. Their animal welfare guidelines are extremely comprehensive. The human resource checklist is a useful tool that incorporates some aspects of social responsibility. FA is transparent in providing its standards and organization information and has an explicit policy that does not allow members who are FA certified from serving on the board of directors. FA is therefore independent from the product that is certified.

PROGRAM NAME:

Food Alliance Program

ORGANIZATION NAME AND CONTACT INFO:

Food Alliance (FA)

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ORGANIZATION SUMMARY:

HISTORY

Food Alliance began in 1993 as a project of Oregon State University, Washington State University and the Washington State Department of Agriculture. A coalition of farmers, scientists, processors, distributors, grocers, farm worker advocates, environmentalists, and consumers were involved in developing the certification program. Food Alliance was incorporated as an independent non-profit organization in 1997. Food Alliance began certifying fruit and vegetable crops in 1998, and began certifying livestock in 2000. The certification for handling facilities was introduced in 2006.

FUNDING

Initial funding for Food Alliance was provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Ongoing support has been provided by a variety of private foundations including: Bullitt Foundation, Cedar Tree Foundation, Ford Foundation, Meyer Memorial Trust, Murdock Charitable Trust, Russell Family Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Food Alliance has also received government grants from the US Environmental Protection Agency, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Risk Management Agency, and USDA Western Sustainable Agriculture and Research Education. In 2006, Food Alliance received 26% of its revenue from non-grant sources, including certification fees, consulting fees, event income, and individual donations. Food Alliance expects certification fees to represent an increasing percentage of revenues over time. See [Donors and Supporters](#).

STRUCTURE

Policy decisions are made by Food Alliance’s Board of Directors. Food Alliance’s Board of Directors is comprised of members representing academic institutions, non-profit organizations, and a variety of industries providing perspectives on food and agriculture, and legal, public relations and other expertise. Food Alliance has an explicit policy that representatives of certified businesses may not serve on the board. Changes to the certification program are recommended by Food Alliance staff, with guidance by a volunteer Stewardship Council with technical and practical expertise in the relevant standards areas.

LABEL STANDARDS AND CRITERIA DETAIL:

Food Alliance - Food Alliance Program - Criteria Table			
Criteria	Certifier Action	Criteria Type	CU Comment
No Use of Genetically Modified Seed Varieties or Livestock Breeds (Whole Farm and Specific Product Evaluation)	Site inspectors will examine records to see if any of the seed varieties or livestock semen, embryos, or other genetics have been produced with genetically modified technologies. (Animals may be fed with GMO feeds; however, applicants are encouraged to source non-GMO feeds if they are available).	Quantitative (Fixed)	
No Use of Hormones or Non-therapeutic Antibiotics in Livestock Production (Whole Farm and Specific	Site inspectors will examine production and veterinary records to ensure fulfillment of this fixed standard. (Note that non-therapeutic use is defined as any	Quantitative (Fixed)	

Product Evaluation)	use of an antibiotic as a feed or water additive for an animal in the absence of a clinical sign of disease; If animals are ill, they may be given therapeutic medicines until they recover.)		
Pesticide Applications (Whole Farm and Specific Crop Evaluation)	Currently, there is a list of prohibited, high-toxicity pesticides. Farms are also evaluated for: a. continuing education b. Integrated pest management planning c. weather monitoring d. crop monitoring/field scouting e. reducing application rates f. pesticide selection and resistance management g. pesticide record keeping h. pesticide record keeping i. application equipment calibration and pesticide drift management j. hazardous material storage and disposal	Quantitative and semi-quantitative analyses (4 point scoring system used and Fixed)	
Continual Improvement of Management and Production Practices (Whole Farm and Specific Product Evaluation)	Upon renewal of certification after three years, farms and ranches must show progress in fulfilling the improvement goals that they set for themselves. Applicants must set 1, 3, and 5 year improvement goals and report on progress yearly.	Qualitative (Fixed)	
Soil / Water Conservation (Whole Farm Evaluation)	Farms are analyzed with regard to: a. continuing education for soil and water conservation b. buffer strips around waterways c. soil erosion prevention d. tillage selection practices and soil compaction prevention e. irrigation systems f. irrigation water conservation g. nutrient management h. soil organic matter management	Quantitative and semi-quantitative analyses (4 point scoring system used)	This criteria is meaningful but would be enhanced if applied at the crop specific level.
Safe and Fair Working Conditions (Whole Farm Evaluation)	A list of 14 factors regarding workers' rights, conditions, safety, children, flexibility, access to facilities and drinking water, and expectations are asked of each farmer.	Semi-quantitative and qualitative - 14 factors must be checked (4 point scoring system used)	
Wildlife Habitat Conservation (Whole Farm)	Farms are analyzed with regard to: a. continuing education b. habitat conservation improvements c. invasive species prevention and management d. threatened and endangered species protection e. wildlife food, cover and water f. linking individual wildlife habitat conservation activities together	Semi-quantitative (4 point scoring system used)	
Healthy and Humane Care for Livestock/Animal Welfare (Specific Product Evaluation)	Farms are analyzed with regard to: a. animal nutrition and health b. living conditions c. livestock handling d. transportation e. handling facilities	Quantitative, semi-quantitative, and qualitative (4 point scoring system used and Fixed)	

	f. humane slaughter g. feed production h. manure management i. animal pest management		
Healthy and Humane Care for Livestock/Animal Welfare: Pork production	Gestation crates are not allowed; acceptable farrowing systems include, but are not limited to: Turn-around crates, sloped farrowing pens (pens must be 5x7 feet or larger), and outdoor pastures with huts; animals must be checked daily for symptoms of stress	Quantitative and qualitative (Fixed)	
Healthy and Humane Care for Livestock/Animal Welfare: Chickens (broilers and laying hens)	Warm season chickens: Chickens raised during spring, summer, and fall must have access to the outdoors. Birds may be "based" out of a house or coop that provides shelter that provides at least 1.5 square feet per bird. Housing floor space must be bedded with straw, sawdust, or other appropriate material	Quantitative and qualitative (Fixed)	
Healthy and Humane Care for Livestock/Animal Welfare: Beef cows	During the growing season, animals must be grazed on pastures and harvest their own feed in a management intensive grazing or comparable scheme; confinement indoors without the use of bedding is not permitted; slatted or wire floors are not permitted	Quantitative and qualitative (Fixed)	
Cultural Practices (Specific Crop Evaluation)	Each crop has a set of tailored guidelines for cultural practices, crop nutrition, insects, diseases, weeds and vertebrate pests.	Quantitative, semi-quantitative and qualitative analyses (4 point scoring system used)	

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See current [Stewardship Council](#).

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