



United States Department of Agriculture  
Food Safety and Inspection Service



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## Fact Sheets

### Food Labeling

#### 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.

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**FRESH POULTRY:**

In August, 1995 USDA/FSIS published a rule attempting to modify the definition of "fresh" to refer to poultry whose internal temperature has never been below 26 °F. That rule said poultry whose internal temperature is between 26 °F and 0 °F cannot be called "fresh" but must be called "hard-chilled" or "previously hard chilled." In January, 1996 the final rule was published in the Federal Register. However, Congress did not appropriate money for enforcing the rule. On August 8, 1996, Congress asked FSIS to revise the final rule. FSIS has now amended the poultry product inspection regulations to prohibit the use of the term "fresh" on the labeling of raw poultry products whose internal temperature has ever been below 26 °F. Also, labels of raw poultry products whose temperature has ever been below 26 °F, but above 0 °F, will not be required to bear any specific, descriptive labeling terms, including "hard chilled" or "previously hard chilled." To be in compliance with the revised rule, raw poultry products that are labeled as "fresh" but have ever had an internal temperature *below 26 °F will have* to have the "fresh" designation deleted or removed from labeling on the package. The final rule also sets a temperature tolerance for raw poultry products. 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. This revised final rule appeared in the December 17, 1996, Federal Register and became effective 1 year later – December 17, 1997.

**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 ADVANCED 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., pork trimmings and ground 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.

**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**

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 turkey*" in the ingredients statement. The final rule became effective November 4, 1996.

**NATURAL:**

A product containing no artificial ingredient or added color and is only minimally processed (a process which does not fundamentally alter the raw product) may be labeled natural. The label must explain the use of the term natural (such as - no added colorings or 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.

**OVEN READY:**

Product is ready to cook.

**YOUNG TURKEY:**

Turkeys of either sex that are less than 8 months of age according to present regulations.

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