

CHAPTER 10

Value-added Considerations, Alternative Farming Systems, and Labeling

By Jeannette Beranger, Research & Technical Program Manager, American Livestock Breeds Conservancy; Global Resource Action Center for the Environment (GRACE) Sustainable Table Program; Marjorie Bender, Research & Technical Program Director, American Livestock Breeds Conservancy

In order to be successful, today's farmers must not only be well versed in farming practices but must be business-savvy in order to stay competitive and profitable. Good business practice recognizes that consumer needs and desires change over time, creating opportunities and niche markets for producers to explore. It may be possible for farmers to enhance their profitability by incorporating new elements in their enterprise that add value. These may come in the form of adopting alternative farming practices on their farm, highlighting the qualities of their products through enhanced marketing strategies, and providing additional or unusual processing options that broaden product appeal to their customers.

Before adopting and acting upon new ideas and concepts, support these changes with a sound business plan. As always, small steps are often better than great leaps into new territory.

Value-added Products and Processing

A vast majority of standard turkey production is focused on the whole bird Thanksgiving market, and to a lesser degree to the Christmas holiday market, but there are other product opportunities for producers to consider. Keep in mind that some turkey carcasses may be returned from the processor to the producer with missing parts due to the poultry inspection process. These incomplete carcasses will not make good table birds but can be utilized to produce other items that may be lucrative for the producer. Standard turkey varieties have meat qualities similar to dark or red meats and lend themselves to producing products that are perhaps non-conventional to poultry. The following list is a few of those products for consideration:

- Sausage (breakfast sausage, dinner sausage, kielbasa, bratwurst, etc.)
- Turkey hot dogs
- Turkey deli meats (ham, salami, pastrami, bologna)

- Turkey bacon and Canadian bacon
- Turkey steaks
- Smoked turkey products
- Turkey jerky

An increasing number of processors and butchers offer value added services so it may be to your advantage to investigate those working in your area. If the service is not provided directly through the processor, it may be possible to find a butcher in the area that could take minimally processed product and turn it into value-added items. To locate processors and butchers locally, see Chapter 9, Processing and Marketing Regulations..

Alternative Farming Practices and Systems

Consumers have become increasingly concerned about knowing the exact source of their food and the methods used to raise it. Central to this change are questions about food safety, nutritional qualities, environmental and human effects, and the animal welfare of products produced within the industrial complex. As a result, the market for foods raised organically, and for animals



Heritage turkey morning sausage links. Photo courtesy of Frank Reese.

raised on pasture and without animal by-products in their diets has risen dramatically and is expected to continue to rise through the next decade. This trend has provided opportunities for farmers that incorporate alternative farming techniques in their operation. Many have taken advantage of this and have found success in a number of alternative and sustainable farming systems.

Sustainable agricultural practices require that the farming methods use by the producer incorporate environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity. Products created through the use of a sustainable agricultural system are sought out by consumers as a means to help them feel connected to and feel good about the products on their table. As demonstrated through tasting comparisons and scientific study, sustainably raised products have improved taste and superior nutritional qualities when compared to conventionally produced products.^{1,2} The motivated consumer is willing to pay higher prices for these items. The trap that farmers must be careful to avoid is overpricing the product. The price must be fair while reflective of the added work or expenditure required to produce the high-quality, sustainably produced product.

Alternative farming practices offer farmers a number of choices that will move them toward more comprehensive production shifts. These practices may move them to long-term economic and environmental sustainability while concurrently producing value-added products. Such practices may include:

- free ranging or pasturing animals
- obtaining certified production status
- using feedstuffs without added chemicals, GMOs (genetically-modified organisms), hormones, or prophylactic antibiotics
- promoting health through management practices thereby reducing the need for medical intervention
- using integrated pest management to limit the use of environmentally toxic pesticides and herbicides

These are all manageable steps that may not require significant investment but can add substantial value to the product.

As farmers continue to explore the many options available, they will find that there are several types of alternative farming systems that are growing in popularity worldwide. The most well-known and familiar alternative farming system is the *Organic* system. In

this system of agriculture, animals are only fed organic feedstuffs and must be allowed access to the outdoors; ruminants are required to have access to pasture. Organic production in North America alone has seen a 20% growth each year over the past 15 years and now incorporates 3.7 million acres of farmland.⁴ The industry is expected to maintain a growth rate of 9-16% through the year 2010.⁴ Farmers can learn more about the process of becoming certified by visiting the USDA website listed in the reference section of this chapter.

Some organic producers have chosen not to participate in the official USDA Organic Certification Program because they are of the opinion that big business has taken advantage of certification and diluted the effectiveness and meaning of the organic movement. These producers continue to farm organically and often implement more stringent farming practices than those that are required by the USDA Organic Certification Program. These farmers refer to their farming practices as *Beyond Organic*. There is no certification process for this system and the consumer must rely solely on the reputation of the farmer.

A much older ecological farming system that pre-dates the organic movement is *Biodynamic*. This method of farming, first developed in the early 1900s by the Austrian scientist and philosopher Rudolph Steiner, is an organic system that takes the additional step of treating the farm and its inhabitants as one living organism. A distinguishing feature of the biodynamic system is the use of homeopathic preparations to fertilize and strengthen the quality of the soil. These preparations are believed to improve the vitality of crops. To further en-



*Free ranged turkeys raised on 100% vegetarian feed.
Photo by Frank Reese.*

hance production, crops are planted according to a very specific calendar that aligns the plants with the rhythms and cycles of nature. The goal of the biodynamic farmer is to create a self-sufficient farming system that needs little to no outside inputs (e.g. fertilizers or feeds) in order to be successfully productive. There are presently 3,000 biodynamic farms worldwide and numbers continue to grow. The Demeter Association certifies biodynamic farms globally based on internationally recognized standards used throughout the world (See contact information in the reference section of this chapter.)

Value-added Labeling

As a result of increased demand for sustainably produced food, many producers have started using specialty labels in order to attract environmentally and socially-conscious consumers. While some labels provide reliable information about how the food was produced, other labels are self-awarded by producers and may be virtually meaningless. Producers should be careful to choose labels that are accurate and understandable to consumers. Those that are administered by and promoted by a reputable organization or agency are most effective and trusted by consumers.

The following text describing common labeling terms is adapted from Global Resource Action Center for the Environment's (GRACE) *Labeling Considerations for Marketing Value-Added Products*.⁵ The definitions for many of these terms are not universally agreed upon, so the most popular explanations are provided.

100% Vegetarian Diet – This term means that animals are not fed any animal by-products. This does not guarantee they were raised outdoors or on pasture, but it should indicate that they were raised on grasses, hay, silage, and other feed found on pasture or in a field. Grain, e.g. corn, is vegetarian and falls into this category. Producers feeding their animals a 100% vegetarian diet must not feed non-vegetarian supplements or additives. Free-ranged omnivores like turkeys will consume bugs, small snakes, and rodents but because these items are not part of a prepared ration, the naturally foraged items do not violate the label.

Antibiotic Free – The USDA has prohibited use of the term “Antibiotic Free,” but still allows meats and poultry to be labeled “No Antibiotics Administered” or “Raised Without Antibiotics.”

Biodynamic – This is an organic system that takes

the additional step of treating the farm and its inhabitants as one living organism. There is an official certification process for these products conducted by the Demeter USA Association. It does not have government oversight.

Cage Free – This term only notes that birds are not raised in cages. This label does not tell the consumer if the birds were raised outdoors or indoors or on a pasture or dry lot, nor does it give other information about living conditions or feed.

Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) – If approved, this initiative would require beef, lamb, pork, fish, perishable agricultural commodities, and peanuts to be labeled with the country in which they were produced. In addition to providing consumers with valuable information about their food, Country of Origin Labeling would help to promote locally-produced meat and would enable meat to be more easily traced in the event of a recall or disease outbreak.

Eco-Labeling – This is an umbrella term for labels that identify products that are produced in environmentally or socially friendly ways. Fair Trade, Organic, Food Alliance Certified, Raised Without Antibiotics, etc. and others are all eco-labels. There exists a wide selection of eco-labels with different criteria and varying degrees of legitimacy. While some labels indicate that food was produced according to strict guidelines enforced and verified by third-party food-certifying agencies, other labels are self-awarded by food producers.

Free Range – “Free Range” or “Free Roaming” means that the animal had some access to the outdoors each day. This doesn't guarantee however, that the animal actually spent any time outside. As long as a door to the outdoors is left open for some period of time, the animal can be considered Free Range. Although USDA has defined this term for chicken raised for meat, no standards have been set for egg-laying chickens or for other animals. Eggs, poultry, or meat that was literally raised outdoors may be labeled “Pastured” or “Pasture-raised” (see below).

Free Walkers – This term describes hens that are housed indoors, though they can move around and have unlimited access to food. Similar to “Cage Free”.

GMO Free or No GMOs – This term describes a product that was produced without the use of GMOs. For poultry and livestock, GMO-free would mean that



Ground heritage turkey burger. Photo courtesy of Frank Reese.

feed and supplements, and forage did not contain genetically modified organisms. Organic and Biodynamic labeled foods are also GMO-free by definition.

Grain Fed – This term describes animals raised on a diet of grain. The grain could be supplemented with animal by-products and other miscellaneous matter. Since mad cow disease has become a concern in the 21st century, cows raised on a strictly vegetarian diet are preferred by many consumers. However, unless the label says “100 Percent Vegetarian Diet,” there is no guarantee that the animal’s feed was not supplemented with animal by-products or that it is organic. Grain-fed animals tend to be raised on large commercial farms.

Grain Finished – This term describes cattle that are fed diets heavy in grain before slaughter. Some producers raise their animals on pasture but then feed them grain, especially corn, for several weeks before slaughter. Corn makes the meat fattier and infuses a flavor that many have come to associate with high quality beef.

Grass Fed – This term implies that animals only eat grass and nothing else, although it does not necessarily mean the animals are grass finished. Although it should imply that animals were allowed to graze naturally while roaming the pasture, it is possible that animals were not able to roam but were simply given grasses, hay, and silage to eat. The reasons for confinement vary from weather or season to limited production acreage.

Grass Fed/Grain Supplemented – This term implies that animals are raised on pasture and eat grasses. At a certain point, grains are slowly introduced into the diet in a controlled amount, along with the grasses. By

controlling the amount of grain, the animals do not develop the digestive problems that solely grain-fed cattle can experience. The animals are not forced to eat the grain because forage continues to be provided.

Heritage – Heritage foods are derived from historic breeds of poultry, livestock, and crops. Animals are assumed to be purebred. Production standards are not established by law, but producers of heritage products most often use pasture-based systems. This method of production saves animals from extinction by engaging them in their historic use and preserves genetic diversity. The term heritage turkey has been approved for use on labels by the USDA, and has been defined by ALBC and established standard turkey breeders.

Hormone Free – USDA has prohibited use of the term “Hormone Free,” but meats can be labeled “No Hormones Administered.” It is against the law to feed hormones to poultry so this term does not apply to the labeling of turkey products.

IPM (Integrated Pest Management) – IPM is based on monitoring insect ecosystems to determine if and when pesticide applications are needed to save a crop. Natural pest control methods, such as habitat manipulation, biological control, and pest-resistant plants, are used to eliminate pest problems. Pesticides are used only if necessary and then carefully timed for the greatest effectiveness in reducing the pest population.

Natural – USDA guidelines state that “Natural” meat and poultry products can only undergo minimal processing and cannot contain artificial colors, artificial flavors, preservatives, or other artificial ingredients. Currently, no standards exist for this label except when used on meat and poultry products. “Natural” foods are not necessarily sustainable, organic, humanely raised, or free of hormones and antibiotics.

No Antibiotics Administered – This means that no antibiotics were administered to the animal during its lifetime. If an animal becomes sick, it will be taken out of the herd and treated but it will not be sold with this label.

No Hormones Administered or No Added Hormones – Animals were raised without added growth hormones. By law, hogs and poultry cannot be given any hormones so the use of this label on these meats is not allowed.

Organic – In order to be labeled “organic,” the product, the manufacturer, and the farmer must all meet the USDA’s organic standards and must all be certified by a USDA-approved food-certifying agency. Only USDA certified-organic foods can use the word “organic” in the actual product name. However, organic ingredients can be listed on the packaging of products that are not entirely organic (for instance, “made with organic flour” on a cookie ingredient label.”) Furthermore, if a company is certified as an organic producer, it can use the word “organic” in its company name. This name can appear on all of its products – even those that aren’t certified organic.

Pastured or Pasture Raised – This indicates the animal was raised on a pasture and that it ate grasses and food found in a pasture, as opposed to being fattened on grain in a feedlot or barn. Pasturing livestock and poultry is a traditional farming technique that when done correctly allows animals to be raised in a humane, ecologically sustainable manner. This is basically the same as grass-fed, though the term pasture-raised indicates more clearly that the animal was raised outdoors on pasture.

Raised without the Routine Use of Antibiotics – This term means that antibiotics were not given to the animal to promote growth or to prevent disease, but may have been administered if the animal became ill.

Self Certified – This term means that the farmer makes personal claims about his or her products such as “No hormones administered,” but there is no outside verification of the claims. Consumers must take the farmer at his or her word. Many reliable, legitimate sustainable farmers are self-certified. They will often provide opportunities for the public to visit their farms and write regular newsletters to develop a trusting relationship with their customers.

Sustainable – A product can be considered sustainable if its production enables the resources from which it was made to continue to be available for future generations. A sustainable product can thus be created repeatedly without generating negative environmental effects, without causing waste products to accumulate as pollution, and without compromising the well-being of farmers, their employees, or communities. Many different agricultural techniques can be utilized to help make food production more sustainable. The drawback of the term “sustainable” is that the term lacks a clear-

cut, universally accepted, enforceable definition, thus is often interpreted in different ways. Sustainable farming is more of a philosophy, a life goal, or way of life than a label.

Third Party Certified (or Verified) – This term means that food is inspected by a company operating independently of the producer or distributor. The third-party certification company confirms the legitimacy of claims made by food producers and distributors, ensuring that the food labels are meaningful. “Organic” and “Biodynamic Certified” are examples of third-party certification. Next to knowing the farmer or butcher, this is the most reliable way for buyers to trust the meat they buy. There are only a few third-party certified labels. To find out what they are, visit the Consumers Union Eco-labels website³ and click on “View by Label” in the “Search by Label” green box.

USDA Certified Organic – These products must meet federally established standards and be certified by an approved third-party certifier. In order to bear the USDA “Certified Organic” seal, a product must contain 95 to 100 percent organic ingredients. Products that contain 100 percent organic ingredients can be labeled “100 percent organic.” Products that contain more than 70 percent, but less than 94 percent organic ingredients can be labeled “Made with Organic Ingredients,” but cannot use the USDA “Certified Organic” seal. Violators of the organic standards can be fined as much as \$10,000 for each offense.

Labeling Claims Review by the Processor

Except for organic, none of these terms are regulated or verified by the government. This means that technically a farmer can claim almost anything. Any claim made by the producer that is intended to be incorporated on the product label must be supported by a signed affidavit from the producer. The affidavit is then submitted (along with the request to add the “language” to the label) to the processing plant to review. Once reviewed, the request will be accepted or denied with explanation.

In the box on the next page is a review process recommended by USDA for the processor to use when reviewing proposed claims that producers wish to include on their product packaging.

Above all else, the label of a product should be truthful and accurate of the item contained within the package.

Animal Production Claims Review⁶

USDA recommends processors follow this process when presented with a proposed label claim.

1. Evaluate the claim (i.e., what are they claiming). Check the file; the label claim may have been approved for this producer before.
2. Review the testimonial. The documentation must support the claims.
3. Review the detailed protocol. Ensure that the protocol describes practices that support the accuracy of the claims that are made. Feed formulations must be included and reviewed to ensure that they do not include substances not permitted by the claim. Ask the producer to explain what each substance is if it is not clear to you.
4. If the claims are approvable but the protocol or testimonial lacks sufficient information to support the claim, contact the producer directly (by phone to save time). Explain what is needed to make the protocol sufficient. Hold the label for a reasonable period of time while the producer provides the additional necessary information.
5. If the claims are not approvable, or the producer cannot provide the additional information to support the claim, return the label unapproved.
6. Claims in secondary products (e.g., Hotdogs, “beef used raised without hormone implants or antibiotics”) must be stated exactly as they are on the supplier’s primary label.

Check with your local processor and plant inspector to be sure that your label concepts are created legally, are accurate, and use acceptable terminology for labeling before making any investment to produce them.

Consider whether you want to participate in one of the growing number of certification and labeling programs. These programs certify that the animals were raised and/or handled in a certain manner.

References

1. Long, Cheryl, and Alterman, Tabitha, “Meet Real Free-Range Eggs,” *Mother Earth News* (Oct/Nov 2007) www.motherearthnews.com/Whole-Foods-and-Cooking/2007-10-01/Tests-Reveal-Healthier-Eggs.aspx.
2. Mother Earth News, “Pasture Perfect,” *Mother Earth*

News (April/May 2002) www.motherearthnews.com/Natural-Health/2002-04-01/Pasture-Perfect.aspx.

3. Consumers Union, *The Consumer’s Union Guide to Environmental Labels*, www.eco-labels.org/labelIndex.cfm, Consumers Union, 101 Truman Avenue, Yonkers, NY 10703-1057, (914) 378-2000.

4. Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, *Agribusiness Marketing Report*, www.dare.agsci.colostate.edu/csuaecon/extension/docs/agbusmarketing/abmr06-01.pdf, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, 888 E. Iliff Avenue, Denver, CO 80210, (720) 913-5270, www.ext.colostate.edu.

5. Global Resource Action Center for the Environment’s Sustainable Table Program, *Shop Sustainable, What to Look For: Understanding Terms and Labels*, www.sustainabletable.org/shop/understanding, Global Resource Center for the Environment (GRACE), 215 Lexington Avenue, Suite 1001, New York, NY 10016, (212) 726-9161, www.eatwellguide.org.

6. USDA, *Animal Production Claims Review*, www.fsis.usda.gov/OPPDE/larc/Claims/RaisingClaims.pdf, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service Office of Policy, Program, and Employee Development, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Resources

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center, 10301 Baltimore Ave., Room 132, Beltsville, MD 20705-2351, (301) 504-6559, fax (301) 504-6409 afsic@nal.usda.gov, www.nal.usda.gov/afsic.

American Livestock Breeds Conservancy, PO Box 477, Pittsboro, NC 27312, (919) 542-5704, albc@albc-usa.org, www.albc-usa.org.

American Grassfed Association, 1648 Gaylord Street, Denver, CO 80206, phone/fax (877) 774-7277, aga@americangrassfed.org, www.americangrassfed.org.

Animal Welfare Institute, *Animal Welfare Approved Standards for Turkeys*, www.awionline.org/farm/standards/turkeys.htm, Animal Welfare Institute, P.O. Box 3650, Washington, DC 20027, (703) 836-4300, awi@awionline.org, www.awionline.org.

ATTRA - National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, PO Box 3657, Fayetteville, AR, 72702, (800) 346-9140 (English), (800) 411-3222 (Español), www.attra.ncat.org.

HOW TO RAISE HERITAGE TURKEYS ON PASTURE

——— Biodynamic Farming and Compost Preparation,
www.attra.org/attra-pub/biodynamic.html.

Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association,
25844 Butler Road, Junction City, OR 97448, (888)
516-7797, (541) 998-0105, fax (541) 998-0106,
biodynamic@aol.com, www.biodynamics.com

The Butcher Search, www.the-butcher-search.com

Demeter USA Association, PO Box 1390, Philomath,
OR , 97370, (541) 929-7148, demeter@peak.org, www.demeter-usa.org.

Eat Wild: The Clearinghouse for Information About
Pasture-Based Farming, 29428 129th Ave SW Vashon,
WA 98070, (866) 453-8489, www.eatwild.com.

Global Resource Center for the Environment (GRACE),
Sustainable Table Program, www.sustainabletable.org.
Global Resource Center for the Environment (GRACE),
215 Lexington Avenue, Suite 1001, New York, NY
10016, (212) 726-9161, www.eatwellguide.org.

Organic Consumers Association, Organic Directories,
Organic Consumers Association, 6771 South Silver Hill
Drive, Finland MN 55603, (218) 226-4164,
www.organicconsumers.org/directories.htm.

USDA, National Organic Program, USDA-AMS-TMP-
NOP, Room 4008-South Building, 1400 Independence
Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-0020, (202) 720-
3252, www.ams.usda.gov/nop/indexIE.htm.

The USDA National Agriculture Library, Abraham
Lincoln Building, 10301 Baltimore Avenue, Beltsville,
MD 20705-2351, www.nal.usda.gov.

USDA, *Food Labeling Fact Sheets*, www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Meat_&_Poultry_Labeling_Terms/index.asp, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service
Office of Policy, Program, and Employee Development
Washington, DC 20250.



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albc@albc-usa.org
www.albc-usa.org

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