



Healthy Eating / Diet Tips & Nutrition

What's Certified C.L.E.A.N. and Certified R.A.W. and Should You Care If It's On Your Food?

These new food labels are here to help you make healthy, ethical choices at the grocery store.



By [Macaela Mackenzie](#) | Sep 29, 2017

Topics: [clean eating diet](#), [raw foods](#), [nutrition labels](#), [organic](#)



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The trendiness of better-for-your-bod food movements—like a push for [plant-based eating](#) and locally sourced food—has certainly made us more conscious of what we're putting on our plates.

It's also turned reading labels at the grocery store into a game of food forensics—does that "certified organic" stamp guarantee a food is healthy? Why doesn't your container of kale chips have a "certified vegan" badge? How do you know if a food is locally sourced? Ethically produced?

"We're having a renaissance in food right now," says V.A. Shiva Ayyadurai, Ph.D., an expert in food and nutrition science and a director of the [International Center for Integrative Systems \(ICIS\)](#), a nonprofit that develops food standards, among other things. "People are becoming more and more conscious of what they're putting in their mouth—they want to know what they're getting."

Wouldn't it be nice if there were a food stamp that just said, "Don't worry, you can feel good about buying this food"? Wish (kind of) granted. [Certified C.L.E.A.N.](#) and [Certified R.A.W.](#) are two food labels—which you may have already noticed on some of your fave healthy snacks like Brad's Raw kale chips, GoMacro superfood bars, or a bottle of Health Aid kombucha—that aim to cover all of your food concerns with a simple stamp.

"It's basically a holistic-systems approach to a certification, bringing together food safety, ingredient quality (like non-GMO and organic), and nutrient density," says Ayyadurai. "It's a scientific approach to understanding food." In other words, a quick and easy way to know exactly what you're getting when you hit up Whole Foods.

What are R.A.W. foods?

The raw food movement (based on the idea that we should eat food in its natural state—read: uncooked) has been around since the '90s, but there wasn't a consensus on the definition of a "raw" food, says Ayyadurai. "If you asked different people, everyone had a different answer," from rules about what temperature was acceptable for cooking food to mandates about sprouted munchies. The result was a lot of confusion—especially as more and more health food companies selling "raw" foods started hitting mainstream grocery shelves. (Learn more about the [basics of the raw food diet](#).)

To come up with an official definition that could be used as an international standard, the ICIS had in-depth discussions with health and food industry experts starting in 2014 to create some universal raw requirements. Ultimately, "people agreed raw foods need to be safe, minimally processed, and have bioavailable nutrients," says Ayyadurai.

From that came the official Certified R.A.W. guidelines:

Real: Foods with a R.A.W. certification are safe, non-GMO, and the majority of the ingredients are organic.

Alive: This refers to how many bio-available enzymes your body is able to absorb from the ingredients. When you heat a food, you lose certain nutrients because they become unabsorbable by your body, explains Ayyadurai. But the temperature at which that happens is

different for every food; for example, the temperature at which kale would start to lose most of its nutrients is different from the temperature at which a carrot would start to lose its nutritional value. To turn this into a scale that the ICIS can use to rate foods, they look at an aggregate of the bio-enzyme levels in all the ingredients.

Whole: These foods have been minimally processed and have a high nutrition score.

What are C.L.E.A.N. foods?

C.L.E.A.N. certified foods spun out as a subset of R.A.W. foods, says Ayyadurai. While the raw food movement has a certain stereotype that might feel too intense for the average healthy eater, Ayyadurai wanted to make sure the idea of choosing healthy, conscious food was accessible to the Average Joe. "We want to sell good food at Walmart," he says. (Note that, while similar, this isn't quite the same thing as "[clean eating](#).")

While all R.A.W. foods are also C.L.E.A.N., not all C.L.E.A.N. foods are R.A.W. Here's what it takes to earn a Certified C.L.E.A.N. stamp:

Conscious: These foods must be safely sourced and produced.

Live: This requirement encompasses the same minimally processed and majority organic requirements of R.A.W. foods.

Ethical: Foods must be non-GMO and manufactured using humane processes.

Active: This represents the same requirements as "Alive" in the R.A.W. certification.

Nourishing: Foods need to have high nutrient density, according to the [ANDI Food Scores](#).

"To the end consumer, when they see C.L.E.A.N., they know it's non-GMO, they know it's organic, they know the person that put this together cared about how that food was processed," says Ayyadurai. "It reveals that the company has prepared their food with a real dedication to the end consumer in terms of health." (BTW, if you're psyched about these certs, you'll go gaga over [biodynamic products and farming](#).)

What does this mean for your shopping cart?

"Our goal in doing this was to make [healthy foods] accessible and create a movement of people becoming conscious of the entire process of food preparation," Ayyadurai says. The idea is not so much that you'll live and die by these stamps—which are only found on packaged foods, like snacks, pantry staples, and supplements—but that you'll keep these requirements in mind when you're making food choices. "The notion here is really to support food manufacturers that are heading in the right direction, it's not to be religious [about food]," he says. (Can we get an *Amen* for that?)

C.L.E.A.N. and R.A.W. certifications are like a compass for making healthy food choices, but they're not the be-all and end-all of healthy eating. Cooking foods above 212 degrees (the cutoff point to be considered R.A.W.) doesn't make them unhealthy. "Just because a food doesn't have these labels does not mean it's not 'clean' or 'raw,'" says Michelle Dudash, R.D., creator of [The Clean Eating Cooking School](#). Produce and raw meats, which aren't covered by the certifications, can definitely still be healthy. "Personally, I always read the ingredients label on the back of the package to see what I am really getting...look for real, whole foods that grow in nature, like whole fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds or legumes." (This [30-day meal-prepping challenge](#) is a great place to start.)

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