

# Kids in Nutrition

HEALTH BEGINS IN YOUTH.

Food Sustainability Program  
Weekly Newsletter

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# Lesson 6: Food Labels & Marketing

The food and beverage industry spends billions of dollars each year on directing [advertising and marketing towards children](#) because of children's purchasing influence and future as adult consumers. These often misleading advertising practices not only have a huge impact on what children eat and ask their parents to buy, but also give consumers the false impression that the food is healthier or better for the environment than it actually is. Marketing channels to reach the youth include television advertising, the Internet, in-school marketing, and product placements. Additionally, the foods targeted towards kids typically lack nutritional value and are highly processed with added sugar, sodium, and unhealthy fat.

## Lesson Objectives

- Understanding tactics of advertisements.
- Understand and decode food labels.

## Certified Food Labels

The government and third-party organizations have [certified food labels](#) that can only be used if the food passes the corresponding regulations and standards. Certified food labels include “USDA Organic,” “Fair Trade,” and more. While these exist to help consumers better understand the quality of the food they are eating, it is important for buyers to look at the product as a whole and truly understand what the standards are. For example, while a package of cookies with a “Non-GMO Project Verified” label ensures that no genetic engineering was used, it does not automatically make the product healthy. Examples of non-certified food labels that are unregulated and thus have little meaning include “Free-Range,” “All Natural,” “Raised Without Antibiotics,” and “Hormone-Free.”



## Greenwashing

[Greenwashing](#) is a practice used to misrepresent a product as more environmentally friendly than it is in reality. Unregulated words such as “sustainable” or “environmentally-friendly” often claim that the product is good for the environment when that may not be the case. Thus, such vague words have little meaning and no proof.

Another tactic is the use of colorful cartoons of happy animals to give the false impression that the animals received better treatment than they actually did.



## Marketing Tactics

[Marketing tactics](#) are different strategies used by companies to increase the appeal of their product and to convince consumers to buy it. TV advertisements or the inclusion of toys with fast-food meals are tactics heavily aimed at kids to increase the appeal of foods that often lack nutritional value. Different tricks can also be used to deceive consumers regarding the nutritional profile and quality of the food, such as the use of unregulated words like “natural.” Even when phrases accurately describe a product, they can be used to mislead consumers regarding the overall benefits of the food. An example is the phrase “zero sugar” placed on a package of beef jerky. While the claim may be true, it acts as a distraction and makes the consumer forget about other drawbacks of the food.

## How to Decipher Food Labels

The best way to assess the quality of a product is to read the nutrition label and list of ingredients. Knowing which labels are certified and which words have misleading meanings will also help. In addition, it is important to note that your first impression of a product may not necessarily be accurate because of all the potential marketing tactics used. For instance, if a granola bar says it is high in protein, double check this claim by reading the nutrition label. Then, look at other aspects of the product — is the food high in sugar or sodium?

## Weekly Challenge!

This week, practice assessing food labels at home by trying some of the following:

- Take pictures of five unreliable labels and five more reliable labels (government or third-party certified labels).
- Look through the nutrition labels of your food products at home, and see if these food products are “healthy” or have lots of sugar, fat, or sodium. Make sure to look at the portion sizes!