



EcoLogo IQ: Deciphering Labels

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Everyone is talking about it. From chefs and culinary mixologists to restaurant owners, food service operators and customers, the green movement has become the topic du jour.

This acceptance into the mainstream has led many within the industry to consider making the eco-leap to reap the environmental and financial benefits of going green. It has also resulted in an influx of 'green' products emblazoned with eco-labels, making product selection difficult and more like a code breaking challenge.

What do all of these labels mean? And, more importantly, which can be trusted?

From Energy Star and EcoLogo to FSC and Fair Trade Certified, this guide to some of the most commonly used 'green' logos will help food service operators choose the right products for their business.

CANADA ORGANIC

Revealed in tandem with Canada's Organic Products Regulations (OPR), the Canada Organic logo assures consumers that products featuring the label, whether domestic or imported, meet very specific production requirements and contain at least 95 per cent organic content. Voluntary use of the logo also provides greater opportunities for Canadian organic farmers

to have their products recognized in this emerging market. Product certification is carried out by certification bodies accredited by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

ECOLOGO

Founded by Environment Canada in 1998, EcoLogo is an internationally recognized eco-labelling program. As North America's largest, most respected environmental standard and certification mark, the EcoLogo can be found on more than 7,000 certified products, including cleaning supplies, candles, coffee, table napkins, toilet tissue, containers, packaging, bags and sacks. Those that bear the green-coloured maple leaf intertwined within three doves meet rigorous health and environmental standards and have been verified by an independent third party auditor.

ENERGUIDE

EnerGuide is a Government of Canada initiative that rates the energy consumption of major appliances (predominantly household), heating, cooling and ventilating equipment and even vehicles. The label shows consumers how much energy an appliance will consume in a year of normal service and how the appliance compares with the most and least efficient models in the Canadian market. Canadian law requires all major household electrical

appliances to display an Energuide label before its first retail purchase.

ENERGY STAR

Energy Star is one of the most popular eco-labels in North America, if not the world. First created as a U.S. government program in the early '90s, it has since been adopted by other countries, including Canada. Energy Star is the international symbol for energy efficiency and may be used on both consumer and commercial products that have been tested according to prescribed procedures and found to meet or exceed higher energy efficiency levels without compromising performance. Although requirements vary from one product category to another, equipment must typically use 10 to 65 per cent less energy and water than comparable standard models to be eligible to use the Energy Star symbol. Commercial products include cooking equipment, dishwashers and solid door refrigerators and freezers. Criteria are updated regularly to keep pace with evolving technology.

GREEN SEAL

Green Seal is an independent, science-based certifier that identifies and promotes environmentally responsible services and products, from coffee filters to air chillers. To earn a "seal of approval," a product must meet the Green Seal environmental standard for the category as demonstrated by rigorous evaluation, testing and an on-site plant visit. The organization evaluates a product or service beginning with material extraction followed by manufacturing and use and then ending with recycling and disposal.

FAIR TRADE CERTIFIED

Fair Trade Certified is a product certification system that assures consumers the purchased product adheres to agreed upon environmental, labour and developmental standards. Administered in Canada by TransFair, the label can be found on select brands of coffee, tea, sugar, fruit (bananas and mangos), cereals (rice and quinoa), spices and wine, among others. The mark is licensed to certified producer organizations with independent third party auditing. This ensures fair trade standards are being met and adhered to. Additionally, these certified producers must meet progress requirements over time to establish greater equity in international trade.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL

The Forest Stewardship Council promotes responsible management of the world's forests. Its international certification and labelling system guarantees that forest products, such as wood and paper, come from responsibly managed forests and verified recycled sources. There are two types of certification – Forest Management (FM) and Chain of Custody (CoC) – and three different product labels: FSC Pure, FSC Mixed Sources and FSC Recycled. Companies that use the FSC 'check-tree' logo on their products have been independently audited.

OCEAN WISE

Ocean Wise is a seafood conservation program that has been making waves since it was first launched in January 2005. Administered by the Vancouver Aquarium, the symbol allows diners to confidently identify and choose restaurants that provide environmentally responsible seafood menu items. The program also provides restaurants with the information and support to

continuously improve menus from an environmental sustainability perspective. For restaurants to participate in the program, they must be dedicated to a process of continuous improvement in the seafood they serve, removing unsustainable seafood items from their menu and replacing them with sustainable alternatives, wherever possible. This classification system is based on information gleaned from internal and external research. Many important factors are considered when determining which seafood is sustainable or not, including: overfishing (the removal of too many fish from the ocean and not allowing them enough time to re-populate before the next catch); bycatch (the capture of animals that were not intended to be part of the catch, such as sea turtle, dolphins, seabirds and sponges); and habitat degradation, which involves fishing and producing fish in ways that negatively affects the quality of water, reefs and other ocean habitats. Any restaurant that has at least one seafood item on their menu can participate in the program and those that have four or more can work toward Gold status.

USDA ORGANIC

USDA Organic is the American equivalent of the Canada Organic logo. Just like its Canadian counterpart, products stamped with the USDA Organic label must be made with at least 95 per cent certified organic ingredients and grown, handled and/or processed in accordance with the USDA's National Organic Program, which regulates the standards for selling an agricultural product as organically produced. Certification is handled by state, non-profit and private agencies that have been approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

OTHER CLAIMS

Natural, all natural and 100 per cent non-toxic claims are regularly encountered by consumers. These labels are general claims made by manufacturers and are not backed by a certifying organization.