Follow the Green Frog to Discover the Rainforest Alliance

Q What does Rainforest Alliance mean on food labels?

A People are interested in treading a little more lightly on Mother Earth, and your food choices are a powerful way to do so. Choosing products labeled with the Rainforest Alliance Certification seal is one way to positively impact the environment. The Rainforest Alliance is a non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to conserving biodiversity and ensuring sustainable livelihoods by transforming land practices, business practices and consumer behavior. Though the Rainforest Alliance initially focused on rainforests, it has since expanded to include countries all over the world.

The seal depicting the little green frog shows you that your purchase adheres to strict standards and guidelines that meet Rainforest Alliance Certification. To bear the seal, foods must contain products from Rainforest Alliance Certified farms, which are evaluated for compliance with 10 standards (scoring at least 50 percent in each standard with an 80 percent overall score) set in place by the Sustainable Agriculture Network. These include:

• Reduce water pollution by controlling sources of contamination.
• Limit soil erosion by implementing soil conservation practices.
• Lower threats to the environment and human health by prohibiting most dangerous pesticides and chemicals.
• Protect wildlife habitat by preserving ecosystems.
• Reduce waste through composting farm by-products such as coffee pulp, and recycling materials.
• Lower water used through conservation measures.
• Manage efficient farming techniques.
• Improve conditions for farm workers, such as fair wages, decent housing, clean drinking water and health care.
• Increase profitability for farmers with higher quality products and increased worker efficiency.
• Boost collaboration between farmers and conservationists to preserve biodiversity of land.

One criticism is that a brand can wear the seal even if just 30 percent of the product comes from a Rainforest Alliance Certified farm, raising the question of where the other 70 percent comes from. Yet, even that small amount from a multinational brand can make a huge impact on the land and those working it. That impact affects up to more than 70 countries around the world who are working to change the way crops are produced. More social and environmental responsibility is not only good for the environment, it’s good for business: it makes farming more competitive by producing higher quality goods that earn a higher profit. It also means that you, as a consumer, can vote with your dollars to support environmental conservation by choosing such products. If you seek out the seal on products you already buy like coffee, cocoa, chocolate, tea, nuts and fruits, you are joining the effort to ensure that resources we rely on today will be here in the future.

Food Flavors and Appetite: A Look at the Flavor Point Diet

Q Is there any proof behind the Flavor Point Diet for weight control?

A If you’re browsing for a diet book, you could do a lot worse than the “Flavor Point Diet” (Rodale Books, 2005), written by renowned health expert and director of the Yale Prevention Research Center, David L. Katz, M.D., M.P.H., with his wife, Catherine Katz, Ph.D. What’s different about this diet tome? The “Flavor Point Diet” suggests that you limit the number of flavor themes—such as sweet, salty or savory—at a meal in order to turn down the volume on your appetite. Katz shares research on the neuroscience of appetite, demonstrating that when people taste too many flavors at once it stimulates the brain’s appetite center and they tend to overeat before they feel full. The perfect example: You can eat a huge savory dinner and still find room for a sweet dessert. Food manufacturers have contributed to the problem by combining a variety of flavors into processed foods that spur the appetite and promote excess calorie intake.

The answer, Katz suggests, is to limit the flavors at a meal in order to reach the “flavor point” where you feel satisfied and stop eating. You can do this by selecting and preparing nutritious foods that are minimally processed—foods that aren’t souped up with hyper-flavors and extra fat and calories. The ‘Flavor Point Diet’ is laid out neatly in phases that allow the reader to understand and develop skills to organize flavors and choose healthful foods, with the assistance of detailed menus and recipes that support a reduced calorie (1,300 to 1,500 calories per day) eating plan. This isn’t a fad diet; it’s a way of eating for life.

What do the experts think about the “Flavor Point Diet”? Mostly, the reviews have been positive. The American Diietetic Association (ADA) gave the book a thumbs up, noting that the diet plan is nutritionally sound and that the flavor themes throughout the book build on an abundance of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, fish and poultry and encourage limiting fat and opting for healthier snacks. The diet also brings to light the intriguing facets of the brain’s appetite center, as long as the dieter avoids getting too wrapped up in the flavor concept and becomes overly restrictive in food variety. EN is on the same page as ADA; there’s a lot to like about such healthful eating advice that comes straight from one of the country’s most respected nutrition and health experts.

Editor’s Note: In our July 2010 feature “Genetically Engineered Foods Update”, we reported that 60 percent of U.S. corn is genetically engineered. The most recent USDA data as of July 2010 indicates that this amount is significantly higher at 86 percent.