

FAQs: Third Party Certification of Gluten-Free Foods

Third party gluten-free certification is a process designed to ensure that strict gluten-free standards are met in the testing and production processes of gluten-free labeled foods, beverages, and supplements.

Manufacturers can choose to hire a third-party to oversee and confirm the accuracy of their gluten-free processes and claims. This type of certification is voluntary.

There are several organizations in North America that certify foods as gluten-free, including Beyond Celiac, the Canadian Celiac Association, the Gluten Intolerance Group, and the Gluten Free Food Program. These groups differ from one another in the criteria they use for certifying products.^{1,2,3,4}

Q: Do third party certifications have different criteria than the FDA gluten-free food labeling rule?

Certifying criteria of some groups may be stricter than the FDA's rules for labeling food gluten-free at <20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten¹. Others may follow similar guidelines to the FDA.

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|  | Beyond Celiac endorses the Gluten-Free Certification Program. Gluten-free products carrying this trademark should contain <20 ppm of gluten. ¹ |
|  | The Canadian Celiac Association endorses the Gluten-Free Certification Program. Gluten-free products carrying this trademark should contain <20ppm of gluten. ² |
|  | The Gluten Intolerance Group endorses the Gluten-Free Certification Organization. Gluten-free products carrying this trademark should contain <10 ppm of gluten. ³ |
|  | The Gluten Free Food Program, National Celiac Association, and other global organizations endorse the Gluten-Free Manufacturing Program. Gluten-free products carrying this trademark should contain <5 ppm of gluten. ⁴ |

What is the difference between third-party certification trademarks and a symbol used by a company to indicate that their product is gluten free?

There are many other gluten-free “symbols” that you may see on product packaging that are not certification symbols. These symbols are used by manufacturers to alert customers that their specific product(s) are gluten-free.

Are certified foods safer for me than other foods that are just labeled gluten-free? Which certification is best?

In short, it is not necessary to limit yourself to only certified gluten-free foods. Foods with specialty certifications may provide you with added confidence in the gluten-free foods you buy. However, this does not mean that foods without certifications are unsafe to eat.

Foods certified by the Canadian Celiac Association, Gluten Intolerance Group, or Beyond Celiac do not necessarily contain a higher proportion of gluten than foods certified by the Gluten Free Food Program.

In addition, a food that is not certified by any organization does not necessarily contain a higher proportion of gluten than foods that are certified. Many labeled gluten-free products that do not have any specialty certification test <5 ppm of gluten.⁵

I read that naturally gluten-free grains and beans can be contaminated with gluten. Is this true?

Wheat, barley, and rye can appear in some packages of naturally gluten-free grains, seeds, and legumes. This cross-contact is likely occurring during harvest, storage, and transport. Unfortunately, gluten-containing grains have been found in some products labeled “gluten-free” and “certified gluten-free”, and in some products from dedicated gluten-free manufacturing plants.⁶

Unless they are labeled gluten-free, lentils and other legumes (chickpeas, etc.) are allowed by law to contain a certain percentage of foreign grain, including wheat, barley, and rye.⁷

Please read this [article](#) on one strategy to address this problem and Gluten Free Watchdog’s opinion.

How can I be sure the grains and beans I buy are safe?

Always buy naturally gluten-free grains labeled gluten-free (with the exception of plain rice). You may also choose to buy certified gluten-free grains.

Whether the lentils or other legumes you buy are gluten free or not, rinse canned ones thoroughly under running water. Pour dried legumes onto a cookie sheet and pick through them, and then rinse thoroughly under running water.⁷

References

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