

What is Artisanal Food?

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Introduction. The word artisanal is used to describe more and more foods these days. You see it used everywhere, including in how we describe some of the foods in our Ferry Plaza Farmers Market. But what exactly is artisanal food?

The term artisanal refers to anything that is hand-made or handcrafted in the style of an artisan, or skilled craftsman. Artisanal foods are made in small amounts and typically adhere to traditional methods and recipes, using high-quality and unprocessed ingredients. They are highly integrated into the slow and local food movements, and are usually produced in a sustainable manner. Artisanal foods are also known to be healthier and taste better; producing them uses resources more efficiently than the production of conventional foods.

Artisanal foods provide a great way to know where your food is coming from. Artisanal sausages are most likely made from meat raised compassionately or organically; artisanal cheeses from cows milked by hand, not machine; artisanal jams and preserves from fruit grown on small farms without hormones or dangerous pesticides. And the providers of these products are often the artisans themselves. Artisanal foods are not necessarily healthy—cheese is still fatty and bread high in carbohydrates—but as part of your normal diet, they can replace questionable processed foods and link you to your local community producers.

No question, artisan foods are popular. From the increase in small, niche names in specialty shops to big, iconic brands on supermarket shelves and the surge of food prep-at-home delivery businesses, artisan food companies seem to be thriving. All of which begs the question: What is artisanal?

Hand-crafted breads, pastries, chocolate, cheese and other foods are frequently defined as artisanal - having authentic, natural qualities that mix fine, fresh ingredients with passion on the part of the artisan, who puts his heart and soul into what he makes.

Changing consumer tastes and preferences for natural, healthy foods have contributed to the rapid surge in artistically made products. These foods usually have cleaner labels, which plays to the current obsession people have with food.

Based on the Italian word *artigiano*, artisan originally referred to a skilled craftsman who carved or otherwise hand-tooled an item.

However, no one can ignore the increasing numbers of consumers searching for more food transparency. According to a survey from Packaged Facts called "Nutritional Labeling and Clean Labels in the U.S.: Future of Food Retailing," 87 percent of Americans "at least sometimes" check the Nutrition Facts panels on packaged foods and beverages, while 56 percent actively look for nutritional information and guidelines.

Conclusion. Next time you shop in your local farmers market, don't limit yourself to raw ingredients. Take a longer look (and a few samples) of some of the amazing products from our modern artisans. If you don't have the time or skill to make something special at home, buy it from someone doing it on a small scale, with great ingredients, in your own community.