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Labeling Beef….What Does All This Mean?

Grassfed

Part 2 of 3

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United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently developed voluntary grassfed marketing claim standards (October 2007). Policy guidelines have also developed acceptable alternatives to the term "grassfed." The standard applies only to meat products processed from ruminant animals.

Acceptable "grassfed" and similar claims	
"free roaming"	"pasture raised"
"pasture grown"	"meadow raised"
"grassfed"	

The grassfed standard requires a 100% forage based diet for ruminant animals that are to be processed into meat products. The standard allows stockpiled and harvested forages during periods when grass is not readily available. Grain and grain byproducts are not allowed to be utilized as a feed source. Some specific ingredients that are not approved for use under new standard guidelines are cereal grains, grain byproducts, cottonseed and cottonseed meal, soybean and soybean meal, non-protein nitrogen sources such as urea and animal byproducts. Mineral and vitamin supplements are acceptable to allow the animal's nutrient intake to be adjusted in order to maintain proper health. Milk consumption, prior to weaning, is acceptable under the standard. Additionally, the animals must have continuous access to pasture.

If accidental supplementation occurs the producer must fully document (through receipts, ingredients, and tear tags) how much, how often, and what was supplemented. Incidental supplementation might occur due to unintended exposure to non-forage feedstuffs or to ensure animal health during poor environmental or physical conditions. It is the responsibility of the producer to maintain adequate records throughout the lifespan of the animal to prove the diet was derived solely from grass and forage.

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) provides voluntary user-fee verification of specific feeding, raising, or processing practices in order to enhance the validity of the claim to consumers. Process verification is provided to producers through Quality System Verification Programs (QSVP). If the producer is verified by QSVP the *"USDA Process Verified"* seal may be used on their product label. It should be noted that although being USDA process verified is voluntary, labels containing the grassfed claim, USDA Process Verified, or any other animal raising claim require approval by the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). The

label containing a grassfed claim can be approved by FSIS without the producer being USDA process verified.

Any producer that becomes USDA Process Verified may use the USDA Process Verified shield and/or term on any of their promotional materials including their label. All promotion materials that utilize the shield or term must be reviewed by the Audit, Review, and Compliance (ARC) Branch of the AMS. This review does not take the place of label approval that is issued by FSIS. ARC review serves the purpose of ensuring that the shield and/or term are accurately represented.

Labels utilizing the shield must meet at least one of the following requirements:

1. The specified process verified points are printed immediately adjacent to the USDA Process Verified shield.
2. An asterisk referring the consumer to the information panel for further information about the specified process verified points is printed with the shield.
3. An asterisk referring the consumer to point of sale information is printed with the shield. In this situation, the company must ensure that the point of sale information is readily available and within close proximity of the display counter containing the product.

More information about QSVP and process verification can be found online at www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/arc/audit.

The American Grassfed Association (AGA) has developed different standards in order to be AGA certified and use the AGA logo on products. AGA standards are much more rigorous and more closely resemble the regulations of the USDA National Organic Program than USDA guidelines concerning grassfed claims.

AGA standards require that livestock are:

- Pasture/grass/forage based (does not contain grain or grain by-products)
- Not fed animal by-products
- Not be administered hormones or antibiotics
- Not be confined to a pen feedlot or other area where forages are not normally grown
- Not fed stockpiled forages for more than 30 calendar days per year
- Only administered approved mineral and vitamin supplements.

Additionally producers must:

- Maintain a supplement log containing receipts, ingredient lists, how much and how often the supplement was used
- Document humane animal welfare, handling, transport and slaughter practices are used
- Maintain written record of vaccines, medications or other substances used in the health care program
- Maintain written record from birth to slaughter allowing traceability of animal
- Maintain records for a minimum of 24 months after animal is sold or harvested

More information about the AGA can be found online at http://www.americangrassfed.com/.

It should be noted that the AGA is not associated with the USDA policy guidelines and its regulations deal only with certification from the AGA and not the USDA. The AGA and USDA are separate entities.

This information sheet has been submitted, but not reviewed by USDA Food Safety Inspection Service. All information is deemed correct and accurate to the best ability of the author and reviewers, based on information utilized at the time of their review.

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