

# United States Standards for Livestock and Meat Marketing Claims

## *Claims relating to live animal production*

**Antibiotic Claims:** to reduce the amount of residue left by the antibiotic the USDA requires a withdrawal period prior to harvest.

For claims you are not allowed to use the term “Antibiotic Free,” but the Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff will allow the term “No Detectable Antibiotic Residue” claim to be used instead. Whenever antibiotic claims are made feed formulations, pharmaceutical invoices, or other appropriate documentation, that verifies that the animals have not received antibiotics in feed or water and whether they have been treated for illness, must support them. Procedures for handling sick animals must be documented.

Claim and Standard:

1. No antibiotics used, or Raised without antibiotics: livestock have ***never*** received antibiotics from birth to harvest.
2. No subtherapeutic antibiotics added, or Not fed antibiotics: Livestock are not fed subtherapeutic levels of antibiotics. They may receive treatment for illness provided the approved FDA withdrawal period is observed.
3. No detectable antibiotic residue: the Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff requires additional information on the label that clearly informs the consumer/purchaser that the animal may have been treated with antibiotics. Livestock may receive antibiotics during the production phase, provided:
  - All antibiotics are withdrawn at least 30 days beyond the minimum FDA withdrawal requirement and,
  - Livestock and meat products contain no detectible antibiotic residue as verified by statistical sampling analysis using a science based testing protocol.

**Breed Claims:** claims for breed of livestock must meet criteria established by an Agricultural Marketing Service-recognized U.S. breed association for the referenced breed. If the breed association does not establish criteria for this claim, animals must be traceable to a parent registered with a breed association.

**Free Range Claims:** Background: these claims relate to the practice of allowing livestock to have continuous and unconfined access to pasture throughout their life cycle. Producers must verify how livestock are cared for during normal and inclement weather conditions, birthing, or other conditions that would merit special protection. Since some consumers prefer products from animals that have been raised using these production practices, producers may seek to improve their returns by appealing to such market niches.

Claim and Standard:

1. Free range, Free roaming, or Pasture raised: livestock that have had continuous and unconfined access to pasture throughout their life cycle, including:
  - Cattle \*- shall never be confined to a feedlot.
  - Sheep \*- shall never be confined to a feedlot.
  - Swine \*- shall have continuous access to pasture for at least 80% of their production cycle.

- \*: Food Safety Inspection Services requires product labels from red meat species with these claims also include the following further qualifying statement: “Free Range- Never Confined to Feedlot.”

**Geographic Location Claims:** Background: Producers, processors, and retail/foodservice operators may want to differentiate their products by identifying the geographic region where the product was produced. References to individual states, countries, or specific or general geographic areas will constitute geographic location claims.

Claim and Standard:

1. Location of raising: the livestock are raised/grown in the specified geographic location from birth to harvest.
2. Location of finishing: the livestock are fed/finished in the specified geographic location for at least the last 100 days prior to harvest.

**Grain Feed Claims:** Background: Livestock are finished on high concentrate rations (grain feeding) to enhance meat palatability. A high concentrate grain ration is any cereal plant product that meets or exceeds 60 Mega calories (Mcal) Net Energy for gain (Neg) per 100 pounds of dry matter.

Claim and Standard:

1. Grain Fed Cattle:
  - Average grain consumption must equal 50% or more of the ration;
  - Neg must average at least 60 Mcal per 100 pounds of ration dry matter;
  - Dry Matter Intake (DMI) during finishing phase must be at least equal to:
   
*((Cattle shrunk weight at the beginning of the finishing phase x 0.014) + 10 pounds).*
  
DMI tolerance cannot be less than 10% of this formula; and,
    - Minimum number of days on feed is 100 days for slaughter steers and heifers and 30 days for cows.
2. Grain Fed Lambs:
  - Average grain consumption must equal 50% or more of the ration;
  - Minimum number of days on feed for slaughter lambs is 50 days.
3. Grain Fed Swine:
  - Average grain consumption must equal:
    - 45% or more of the nursery phase (pig weight 15- 65 pounds) ration; and,
    - 65% or more of the finishing phase (pig weight 65- 300 pounds) ration.
  - Minimum number of days on feed for slaughter hogs is 60 days.

**Grass Fed Claims:** Background: This claim refers to the feeding regimen for livestock raised on grass, green or range pasture, or forage throughout their life cycle, with only limited supplemental grain feeding allowed. Since it is necessary to assure the animal’s well being at all times, limited supplementation is allowed during adverse environmental conditions. Grass feeding usually results in products containing lower levels of external and internal fat (including marbling) than grain-fed livestock products.

Claim and Standard:

1. Grass fed: grass, green or range pasture, or forage shall be 80% or more of the primary energy source throughout the animal's life cycle.

**Hormone Claims:** Background: Hormones \* are synthetic or naturally occurring compounds which have been shown to improve gain or feed efficiency, stimulate growth, and/or control reproductive activity. Since all plants and animals produce hormones, a "hormone-free" plant or meat product is a misnomer and a "hormone-free" marketing claim **cannot** be made. However, since some customers prefer meat products from animals that have not received supplemental hormones and some markets restrict the sale of hormone-treated product, the following claims and standards will be recognized.

Claim and Standards:

1. No supplemental hormones \* used, raised without supplemental hormones \*, or no added hormones \*: the livestock have **never** received supplement hormones from birth to harvest.
2. No hormones \* administered during finishing: the livestock **have not** received supplemental hormones during the feeding/finishing period.
  - \*: The terms "hormone," "growth promotant," "growth stimulant," and "implant" are used interchangeably.

**Livestock Identification Claims:** Background: Livestock identification is used to establish ownership, ancestry, pedigree, or age; to trace origin of livestock; or to manage herd health, artificial insemination, and performance testing programs. Livestock identification from birth or a stated point of production through retail product outlets may also address consumer requests for more information about the characteristics of products they buy and increase returns to producers.

Claim and Standards:

1. Source verified: must include the following:
  - Method of livestock identification;
  - Location(s) where livestock are born, raised, fed, harvested, and processed; and,
  - Identification of the producer(s).
2. Individual animal identification: must fulfill the source verified requirements and also have unique, individual animal identification. The American Information Number (AIN) system or other numbering scheme that provides for unique identification of animals and verification of program claims may be used.

**Preconditioning Claims:** Background: Preconditioning of animals by livestock producers can yield advantages in the livestock raising process by reducing animal stress, mortality rates, shrinkage, and the transition time required to start animals on feed.

Claim and Standards:

1. Preconditioned for "x" days (where "x" is the number of days prior to sale/shipping): animals for which a preconditioning claim is made must receive the following treatments (as appropriate) at least 45 days prior to their sale/shipment:
  - Dehorning (when applicable);
  - Castration (if male);

- Vaccinations;
- Treatment for control of parasites;
- Weaning; and,
- Training to eat and drink from feed and water bunks.

**Vitamin E Claims:** Background: Inclusion of vitamin E in feed rations, in the form of alpha-tocopheryl acetate, has been shown to improve product color and case life. Promotion of vitamin E use is limited to livestock producers, packers, and wholesalers. Retail-marketing claims, such as “Vitamin E fed” or “Vitamin E enhanced,” are not allowed by FSIS because consumers do not receive a supplemental level of vitamin E by consuming vitamin E-fed beef. Animal identification, reviewing feed rations and records, and testing feed samples and muscle tissue samples may be verification elements to support this claim.

Claim and Standards:

1. Cattle have been fed supplemental levels of vitamin E. (Promotion of vitamin E use is limited to livestock producers, packers, and wholesalers):
  - Minimum of 50,000 International Units (IU)/head during feeding period (IU tolerance =  $\pm 15\%$ );
  - Minimum feeding period of 30 days; and,
  - Minimum carcass alpha-tocopheryl acetate concentration from the neck muscle (retus capiti doralis major) not less than 3.2 micrograms ( $\mu\text{g}$ ) alpha-tocopheryl acetate/gram (g) of tissue. (Alpha-tocopheryl acetate concentration tolerance =  $\pm 15\%$ ).

### *Claims Relating to Product (Meat) Characteristics*

**Aged Meat Claims:** Background: Aging is the process by which meat is held at a controlled temperature for a specified period, beginning at the time of harvest, to allow enzymatic activity to degrade complex proteins and promote the development of flavor and tenderness. When a product is “dry aged” humidity control is also a critical element of the aging process.

Claim and Standards:

1. Aged meat products: type of aging and length of postmortem aging (in days) must be specified. The actual number of days aged and type of aging (dry or wet) may also appear on the retail label.
  - Beef:
  - Must be wet aged for a minimum of 21 days or dry aged for a minimum of 35 days.

**Electrical Stimulation Claims:** Background: Electrical stimulation improves muscle tenderness by minimizing cold shortening, increasing enzyme activation at higher carcass temperatures (thereby accelerating the aging process), and by physical disruption of muscle fibers through extreme muscle contractions. It further results in accelerated rate of postmortem pH decline as well as an accelerated onset of rigor mortis.

1. Electrically stimulated beef: the electrical stimulation applied to the carcass must meet the following minimum requirements:
  - The cross product of voltage and amperage (voltage multiplied by amperage) must be  $\geq 500$ ; and,
  - Consist of at least three cycles with a minimum pulse of  $\geq 1.5$  seconds “on” and  $\geq 1.0$  seconds “off.”

**Tenderness Claims:** Background: Although individual perceptions vary, for most consumers increased tenderness and juiciness, as well as flavor intensity, contribute to an increase overall palatability. Of all the palatability attributes, tenderness is the most critical to consumers. Results of objective measurements or subjective evaluations can be used to develop quantitative ranking systems, which provide a relative level or degree of tenderness. Factors such as degree of doneness, physical size of a sample, and orientation of muscle fibers can dramatically affect the results of tenderness evaluations. Therefore, specific details of evaluation techniques and conditions used to establish tenderness claims must be fully documented.

Claim and Standards:

1. "Company X's" tender "species": A tenderness management system must include at least 3 of the following controlled elements and must be statistically verified ( $P \leq 0.05$ ) to meet an objective tenderness evaluation of a WBS score  $\leq 4.0$  kg, using a  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (1.27cm) core, when cooked to 160°F (71°C). The objective tenderness evaluation must be revalidated on an annual basis.
2. Control elements:
  - Genetics
  - Age of livestock
  - Feeding management
  - Electrical stimulation
  - Aging
  - Ingredients added to enhance tenderness
  - Instrument assessment
  - Mechanical

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