

New Grass Fed Labeling Standards and Comments Taken on Natural Standards

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USDA recently announced grass-fed standards for labeling beef. These standards were published in the Federal Register and can be viewed at the USDA AMS website. The published standards are more clear than the original proposed standards which is a result of the comments received.

Individuals considering using a grass-fed label should read through the standards. A few of the items listed in the standard will be presented below, but again please read through the standards carefully.

The labeling standards indicate that animals (ruminants) must consume grass and forage over its lifetime. Forage is loosely defined as grass, forbs, browse, or cereal grain crops in the vegetative state. Livestock must have continuous access to pastures during the growing season. During periods when harvested forage is fed, hay, haylage, baleage, silage without grain, crops residues without grain, and other forage or roughage sources are permitted. Milk is allowable through weaning. Mineral and vitamin supplementation may also be included in the animals' diet to mitigate deficiencies.

Supplementation with other non-forage feedstuffs is allowed in the standards. Though these conditions are less defined and provide some flexibility as interpreted. Supplementation to ensure the animals' well being during "adverse environmental or physical conditions" is allowable. The standards do not define these conditions, but are expected to include situations such as the recent drought and flooding as well as situations in which forage availability is extremely limited. Documentation is required which examples listed include receipts of purchase, feed tags, and/or information on feedstuffs offered. Individuals must record the amount offered and the frequency of supplementation. Supplements may not include cereal grains, grain by-products, or non-protein nitrogen. They may only include highly fibrous feedstuffs which are also "low in total digestible nutrients" or TDN. Again, no limits or detailed specifications with respect to TDN are listed on these products allowing for some flexibility in interpretation. An example listed as such a feedstuff intended to fit this specification is cottonseed hulls which vary in TDN but one report lists them at 38% TDN (Hale et al., 1969).

For more information on the grass fed label standards, go to the USDA AMS website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/stand/grassclaim.htm> and read through the notice for the claim standards. While reading these claim standards, you may also want to read through the proposed claims for naturally raised. Comments on these standards will be accepted through January 28, 2008. All comments are to be submitted electronically at the URL <http://www.regulations.gov>.