

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE  
LIVESTOCK & SEED PROGRAM**

**USDA BEEF CARCASS CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS  
LIVESTOCK & SEED PROGRAM POLICY**

**SCOPE:**

The Livestock and Seed (LS) Program, through the Meat Grading and Certification Branch (MGCB), provides certification of beef carcasses for a number of marketing programs making claims concerning breed of cattle and carcass characteristics, or only for carcass characteristics. These characteristics go beyond the requirements for official USDA grades. MGCB certification is often the basis for approval of meat product labels making a variety of marketing claims. The carcass certification programs vary widely in the level of claims for “quality”. In order to provide program originators and purchasers of certified products with the best service, this document outlines LS Program policy on the requirements for these carcass certification programs.

**POLICY:**

- 1) Specific requirements for quality attributes for each certified program will be determined by the originator of the program and will be included in the publicly available specification for the program approved by the LS Program.
- 2) Certification will only be provided for carcasses that have been identified with an official USDA quality grade for those programs that specify quality related attributes. All carcass certification programs will list all classes and grades that qualify for the program.
- 3) Carcass certification programs with a range of quality extending to more than two quality grades must identify the actual grade of the product in each package on the product label, or specify the lowest possible grade followed by “or higher.” Carcass certification programs with multiple brand name variations in the same specification (with a common basic brand name) cannot have marbling score overlap.
- 4) Terms indicating a non-specific or unofficial level of quality (e.g.; Premium) must be preceded by the company’s name in the carcass certification program name and on all labels.
- 5) Claims for breed of cattle (e.g.; Angus) based on phenotypic characteristics or genetics must meet the specific requirements promulgated by the appropriate U.S. breed association.
- 6) Beef carcasses that receive a preliminary identification mark based on a LS Program approved specification at the time of slaughter can only be used for officially certified programs. Once a certification determination is made, the preliminary identification marks must be removed from non-qualifying carcasses. Procedures for identification,

certification, and control of certified carcasses shall be in accordance with established MGCB Instructions.

- 7) The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), Labeling and Consumer Protection Staff in Washington, DC must approve labels for products making a breed claim and/or referencing USDA Certification. Approved specifications should be submitted with the label application.
- 8) All point of sale and marketing materials (i.e.; other than product labels) for carcass certification programs shall list the claims that are certified. Information and claims made on product labels shall be consistent with other point of sale and marketing materials and FSIS requirements.
- 9) "USDA Certified" shall not precede a breed name, and can only be used in reference to a certified "program."
- 10) Carcass certification program originators are responsible for subsequent use, or misuse, of labels and marketing materials by handlers and marketers of their products. The finding of materials not in compliance may result in cancellation of the carcass certification program and FSIS rescindment of any label approvals based on the previously approved program. Any changes to established carcass certification programs must be approved by the LS Program and FSIS and customers for those products must be notified of the changes.
- 11) New or revised carcass certification programs shall be considered and approved in accordance with procedures established Standardization Branch Procedure SP-1.
- 12) Information on LS Program policies and procedures, and all approved carcass certification programs may be obtained from the official website at:  
<http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/certprog/industry.htm>

**APPROVED:**

\_\_\_\_\_/s/ William T. Sessions \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_July 25, 2002\_\_\_\_

William T. Sessions

Associate Deputy Administrator