

## **GRADE LABEL SERVICES**

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Dairy Grading Branch offers many services on a voluntary, user fee basis that help provide assurance of wholesome and high-quality milk and dairy products.

Dairy products have an important role in menu planning. They are essential for a well-balanced diet, are part of many dishes, and provide the excellent flavor consumers desire. Since many dairy products are perishable, careful selection and quality control take on added importance if high quality and customer acceptability are to be maintained. There can be a wide variation of the quality of dairy products available, the grade label and quality approved shield provide the buyer and consumer a way to know which products have the high quality they desire.

## **PRODUCT QUALITY**

Everyone seeks top quality in the products they buy, and AMS can help with that buying decision. The Dairy Division has established standards or specifications for many dairy products. Products are inspected and graded according to quality and appearance. When selecting a product bearing a grade or quality approved shield printed on the package, the buyer knows what to expect when it comes to consistent taste, feel, appearance, and color of the product.



## **UNIFORMITY**

Dairy product grading also generates uniformity. All products with the same USDA shield meet the same standard of quality and wholesomeness thus allowing purchase from a number of suppliers with confidence.

## STANDARDS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Products may be graded based on USDA grade standards or they may be evaluated based on other agreed upon specifications. USDA can assist buyers with developing specifications for the display of the USDA quality approved shield on any product.



## WHOLESDOMENESS

Before a dairy product can even be inspected, the processing plant must meet USDA requirements for quality and sanitation. A USDA dairy inspector conducts routine sanitation inspections of the plant, incoming raw products, and processing procedures.

## OPTIONAL SERVICES

Upon request, AMS can provide a variety of optional services to assist the buyer obtain full value for their purchasing dollar.

### Test Weighing:

Finished containers are weighed to assure that the declared net weight has been accurately packaged.

### Condition of Container:

The condition of the packaging is evaluated to assure that containers properly protect the product to maintain its quality.

### Laboratory Services:

Services available include all chemical and bacteriological determinations needed to evaluate class, quality, condition, and keeping properties.

## **DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

AMS can mediate between a dairy plant and a buyer if there is a disagreement between the two over quality, condition, or weight.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information about USDA dairy services, write to: USDA/AMS/Dairy Division, Dairy Grading Branch, Room 2746-South Building, 1400 Independence Avenue SW - Stop 0230, Washington, DC 20250-0230, or call the Dairy Grading Branch at 202-720-3171, fax 202-720-2643 or e-mail at First name.Last name@usda.gov (for example: Duane.Spomer@usda.gov.)

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