

Livestock and Poultry Program

Remote Grading Program for Beef

Options and Cost Considerations for Grading Service

The Remote Grading for Beef (RGP) utilizes imaging technology and digital data collection to mirror what an official USDA Grader does when physically at the packing facility. The RGP makes USDA Meat Grading Service significantly more accessible to smaller volume, independent packing operations, providing an opportunity to market their high-quality beef as USDA Prime, Choice, or Select and/or to participate in approved Certified Meat Programs.

It is important for Applicants to fully consider the available options, estimated costs, and potential returns of participating in USDA Grading Service before proceeding. Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss their options with AMS-LP prior to submitting a Request for Service.

Fees For Service

The Agricultural Marketing Service Livestock and Poultry Program (AMS-LP) is required by law to recover the costs of voluntary USDA Meat Grading and Certification services. Fees for service are adjusted annually and listed [on the AMS website](#). Effective October 1, 2024 USDA Unscheduled Meat Grading Service fees are:

Activity	Regular per hour	Overtime per hour	Holiday per hour
Unscheduled Grading (8 hours or less per day between 6:00 AM and 6:00 PM)	\$123.00	\$142.00	\$166.00

Option 1: Unscheduled Grading Service- Remote Grading Program for Beef

The remote grading process may be the best option for packing operations requiring Meat Grading Service for limited volumes of product multiple times a month or intermittently during the year. While removing much of the travel-related costs associated with Unscheduled Grading Service, Applicants are still assessed service fees covering the grading and certification activities, monthly records reviews, and the minimum of one on-site visit at the initiation of RPG participation and annual on-site surveillance visits thereafter. Should the Applicant request Unscheduled Grading Service under the RGP, an official USDA Grader will be available to complete the grading and certification activities “remotely” on an as-needed basis. AMS-LP maintains a maximum turnaround time of 24 hours to provide official grading/certification results to the Applicant.

RGP Cost Considerations and Estimates

1. Initial Site Visit: \$1,500 - \$2,500 per visit (consult with AMS-LP for an estimate)

- a. Purpose: Program review and completion of the Grading Plant Survey.
- b. Recurrence: One-Time; After Request for Service is approved, prior to start of grading activities.

- c.** Charges inclusive of time at the **Unscheduled Rate** and travel-related expenses.
- 2. Product Grading and Certification: \$123 per hour**
 - a.** Purpose: USDA Grader receipt, assessment, and communication of grading/certification results.
 - b.** Recurrence: As needed, upon request.
 - c.** Note: The minimum charge is ½ hour per request. Typically, 15-20 grade calls per hour.
- 3. Records Reviews: \$123 per hour, monthly**
 - a.** Purpose: Program surveillance for compliance with regulations, policies, and procedures.
 - b.** Recurrence: Monthly.
 - c.** Note: \$123 per hour. The minimum charge is ½ hour per review. Typically, the review takes less than an hour.
- 4. Surveillance Visits: \$1,500 - \$2,500 per visit (consult with AMS-LP for an estimate)**
 - a.** Purpose: Program compliance and plant records review.
 - b.** Recurrence: Annually.
 - c.** Charges inclusive of time at the **Unscheduled Rate** and travel-related expenses.
 - d.** Note: AMS-LP reserves the right to conduct additional surveillance visits for cause at the Applicant's expense.

Option 2: **Unscheduled In-Plant Grading Service**

Applicants may request in-person **Unscheduled Grading Service**, which may be requested on an as-needed, or intermittent basis. This service option is typical for operations which require service on a less-than-full time basis.

Should the Applicant request **Unscheduled Grading Service**, AMS-LP will deploy a USDA Grader to the plant on an as-needed basis, and the Applicant is charged the travel-related expenses. To the extent possible, AMS-LP attempts to minimize these expenses by utilizing USDA Graders stationed in close proximity, by cross-training and utilizing other Federal or State personnel to perform service, or by prorating the expenses if the USDA Grader can conduct other fee for service activities while on travel. AMS-LP has cooperative agreements with several State agencies to perform **Grading Service** on USDA's behalf and, in some cases, this may present the most cost-effective option for the Applicant.

Option 3: **Scheduled In-Plant Grading Service**

Applicants may request in-person **Scheduled Grading Service**, which requires a service commitment of a minimum 8 hours per day and 40 hours per week. This service option is typical for higher volume operations which utilize **USDA Meat Grading Service** on a regular daily basis, often on multiple shifts. Because the USDA Grader is in-plant on a continuous basis, there are limited additional expenses related to surveillance and compliance visits under a **Scheduled service agreement**.

Should an Applicant request **Scheduled Grading Service**, AMS-LP assigns one or more full-time USDA Graders to the plant/duty station.

For additional information on RGP, visit www.ams.usda.gov/remote-beef-grading