



## **GRADING POULTRY PARTS**

### **Purpose**

This instruction defines requirements for grading poultry parts.

### **Procedures**

Poultry parts that have been properly cut as described in 70.210(e) may be graded after they have been cut from the carcass if the class is known and the parts are not misshapen or have nearly the same appearance as prior to cutting from the carcass. Slight discolorations are permitted on the skin of skin-on products or on the flesh of skinless products provided they do not detract from the appearance of the product.

#### **I. Bone-in Skin-on Parts**

Breasts with ribs may be labeled as U.S. Grade A and B provided there are no broken ribs having a shattered or splintered appearance. Processors may improve styling on packages of breasts with ribs by mechanically scoring the inside of the rib cage with circular saws, knives, or other devices, and “folding” the rib cage. The use of this process eliminates shattered and splintered ribs and is acceptable for poultry bearing grade identification. Manual crushing of the rib cages to facilitate styling generally does not result in parts being free from shattered and splintered rib bones and, therefore, product produced in this manner is not eligible for grade identification.

Skin shall be attached to each piece of poultry. Trimming of the skin is allowed provided at least 75 percent of the normal skin covering remains on the part and uniformly covers the outer surface in a manner that does not detract from the appearance of the part.

Thighs or legs with back portions may have the thigh bone (femur) disjointed from the hip joint or may have an incision the width of a knife blade made into the underside meat tissue along or across the femur and still be eligible for grade identification. These processes, either by mechanical or manual means, are necessary to improve the cooking of the parts and to reduce discoloration around the hip joint and along the femur. The disjointing process may result in cuts or holes in the abdominal fat attached to the leg or thigh. These cuts are permitted on Grade A product provided they do not expose flesh or detract appreciably from the appearance of the part.

Grade A tolerances for exposed flesh and discoloration on split poultry and front or rear poultry halves have been established for the whole carcass weight range from which the halves or split poultry were cut. To be eligible for these tolerances, the breast portion must include the full front and corresponding back portion, with or without wing portions or bone-in wings. Use the Grade A whole carcass tolerances for disjointed bones and missing parts. For Grades B and C, the established parts criteria are applicable.

#### **II. Boneless Skin-on Parts**



Raw boneless skin-on breasts, drumsticks, thighs, legs, and specified subportions thereof, may be graded for A quality. Skin shall be attached to each piece of boneless poultry. Trimming of the skin is allowed provided at least 75 percent of the normal skin covering remains on the part and uniformly covers the outer surface in a manner that does not detract from the appearance of the part. Trimming of the meat tissue is permitted along the edge of the part provided at least one-half of the part remains intact and results in a portion that approximates the same shape and symmetrical appearance of the original part. Slight trimming is also permitted on the inner muscle surface. Portions of graded parts may be removed for weight-making purposes provided at least one-half of the part remains.

Boneless parts shall be free of cartilage, bone, holes, and undue muscle mutilation and must meet the applicable bone-in tolerances for exposed flesh, discoloration, and defeathering. Holes in meat resulting from the removal of the patella (knee cap) are permitted in boneless legs, provided the bulk of the drumstick and thigh remains intact and connected. Boneless thighs or breasts (excluding the attached tenderloin) may have soft-like tendons or tendinous material provided such material is not  $\geq 3/8$  inches. Boneless drumsticks or legs shall be free of tendons extending more than 1/2 inch beyond the meat tissue.

### **III. Boneless Skinless Parts**

Raw boneless skinless breasts, drumsticks, thighs, legs, and specified subportions thereof may be graded for A quality. Trimming of the meat tissue is permitted along the edge provided at least one-half of the part remains intact and results in a portion that is the same shape and symmetrical appearance of the original part. Slight trimming is also permitted on the inner muscle surface provided it results in a smooth appearance. Portions of graded parts may be removed for weight-making purposes provided at least one-half of the part remains.

Boneless skinless parts shall be free of cartilage, bone, blood clots, discoloration (other than slight discoloration), and undue muscle mutilation. No cuts, tears, or holes are permitted in the muscle tissue. For boneless skinless legs, holes in the meat resulting from the removal of the patella (knee cap) are permitted, provided the bulk of the drumstick and thigh remains intact and connected. Boneless skinless thighs or breasts (excluding the attached tenderloin) may have soft-like tendons or tendinous material provided such material is not  $\geq 3/8$  inches. Boneless skinless drumsticks or legs shall be free of tendons extending more than 1/2 inch beyond the meat tissue.

Separation of the muscle tissue and abrasions on the outer muscle surface are permitted on boneless skinless parts provided they do not detract from the appearance of the product. As a general guideline, abrasions resulting in a readily observable angular indentation in the muscle surface are not permitted. Those yielding a smooth muscle surface with an even appearance are permitted.

Tenderloins may be labeled as U.S. Grade A provided the tenderloins are free of bone, cartilage, blood clots, bruises, discoloration (other than slight discoloration), and undue mutilation. Slight trimming along the edge of the tenderloin is permitted provided it does not detract from the appearance of the part. Strands of tenderloin tissue not attached to the tendon and tissue



separations that run parallel to the muscle fibers are permitted provided such conditions do not detract from the general appearance of the product. Tendons normally associated with tenderloins are permitted.

#### IV. Size Reduced – Boneless Skinless Parts

Boneless skinless parts may be subdivided by cutting, slicing, dicing, or similarly size reduced prior to grading and still be labeled as U.S. Grade A. The reduction process must result in size-reduced portions of meat that are intact, not mutilated, and with surfaces that appear relatively smooth. Individual size-reduced portions of meat shall be relatively uniform in size and shape, and consistent with the size reduction process. Variations in the shape of the outer edges of the individual portions of meat are permitted. Additionally, individual slices from boneless skinless products labeled as “sliced” must: (1) originate from the slicing of a boneless skinless part, and (2) collectively approximate the shape of the part prior to slicing. Slices do not have to originate from the same part.

The size-reduced boneless skinless meat shall be free of cartilage, bone, blood clots, discoloration (other than slight discoloration), cuts, tears, or holes in the muscle tissue. Slight discoloration, minor flesh abrasions, and separation of muscle tissue are permitted, provided they do not detract from the appearance of the product. Size-reduced boneless skinless thighs or breasts (excluding the attached tenderloin) shall be free of tendons. Size-reduced boneless skinless drumsticks or legs shall be free of tendons extending more than 1/2 inch beyond the meat tissue.

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