



## **SEALING AND STAMPING**

### **Purpose**

This instruction ensures that the product certified by the USDA grader maintains its integrity and is identifiable through all stages of production, storage, and shipment. This instruction also outlines procedures for sealing and stamping.

### **Policy**

All packages and packaging materials must be clean and in new condition, must not impart objectionable odors or flavors to the commodity, must be safe (cannot adulterate product or be injurious to health) for use in contact with food products and must be tamper-evident. Tamper evident is defined as packaging or packing materials with one or more barriers of entry, which, when breached or missing, can reasonably be expected to provide visible evidence that tampering has occurred.

Applicants shall provide all materials for sealing. Applicants are responsible for obliterating Official USDA box markings and stamps from rejected product within 30 days of the rejection notification which USDA grader oversight.

Unless otherwise specified in contractual documents, containers shall be marked, strapped (closed) and sealed in accordance with the Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications (IMPS) General Requirements.

Stamping shipping containers of certified product is an important identification process linking the certified product to the certification document. Failure to officially identify product at the time of examination may prevent the applicant from obtaining an appeal grading.

### **Procedure**

#### **I. Sealing**

When certifying product for commodity specifications, approved specifications, or other certifications where stamping is required, sample cases shall be double stamped and all other cases in the lot shall be single stamped with the appropriate stamp. When certifying product for Export Enhancement, test weighing, condition examinations, etc., all sample cases shall be double stamped. The stamping of the remaining cases is optional as requested by the applicant. Although stamping of all certified product is encouraged, other methods of product/certificate linking may be used when reviewed and approved by the Supervisor.

Grademarks may be applied to a shipping container with a rubber stamp. The rubber stamp may not be applied to a consumer carton within a shipping container unless special approval is obtained from the National Office. Official stamps may be used only when the resident grader is on duty in the plant.



Grademarks on pressure-sensitive stickers may be used on consumer packages, provided they adhere so that they will not come off during normal handling or during freezing. Firms should be encouraged to have the grademark printed along with other labeling information

## **II. Computer Generated Stamps**

Upon review and approval, packaging materials may be officially identified with computer generated official stamp imprints provided the official identification is legible and meets the size and shape requirements specified in the regulations. The use of computer stamp imprints will be limited to the U.S. Grademark, U.S. Sample Graded, and Officially Certified stamps. The Contract Compliance stamp may be used provided it is applied on the packaging material only after all contract specification requirements have been verified. Graders will closely monitor and account for the use of computer generated stamp imprints.

Use of any computer generated official stamp imprint requires approval by the National Office. Graders may not authorize the shipment of poultry in packing material bearing the stamp imprints until they are approved. To obtain approval, plant management must submit established control procedures of the label to the National Office with an example of how it will be applied to the packaging material. Upon completion of the review of the established accountability procedures and approval, the approving official will provide a copy of the label and related information regarding its approval to the appropriate Regional Director who will forward the information to the applicable Federal-State supervisor and grader. A copy of the approved label shall be filed in folder number "14" in the grader's official files. Prior to each use, plant management must advise the grader of their intention to use the labels and the amount of product to be labeled.

Once approved, graders shall authorize and monitor the application of computer generated stamps by plant employees using the same guidelines applicable for the use of official stamps as outlined in AMS/PY Instruction 929-4, A-3, Accountability in the General Index. The "List of Authorized Users of USDA Grading Stamps" log shall be completed and filed in folder number "6" in the grader's official files.

### **A. Types of Stamps**

1. U.S. Grademark (Figure 1) - For use on a container to designate consumer grade. Either the certificate number or the date of production may be used in conjunction with the grademark.
2. Sample Graded (Figure 2) - For use when grade certification is made in conjunction with other factors such as test weighing, temperature certification, etc. This stamp may only be used when a certificate is actually issued and shall show the certificate number in the stamp.



3. Contract Compliance (Figure 3) - For use on poultry items graded or certified for approved specifications and commodity specifications. Either the certificate number or the date of production may be used in the stamp. The contract compliance stamp is only applied after product is determined to be in compliance with all contract and specification requirements. Optionally, the contract compliance stamp may be applied at time of packaging in reprocessing plants conducting online product examinations (i.e., test weighing and freezer verification). This option may only be used when approved by the Federal-State supervisor.
4. USDA Lot Stamp (Figure 4) - This stamp may be used to identify or account for product that has been graded according to special purchase requirements for later use in the plant where produced. It may also be used to identify further processed items produced according to approved specifications. The consecutive day of the year will be used in the stamp.
5. USDA Officially Certified Stamp (Figure 5) - For use on poultry sampled for temperature, condition, weight, or other certifications and approved specification requirements where the grade is not referenced on the certificate or when product is not identified with an official grade. This stamp may be used only when a certificate is actually issued and shall show the certificate number in the stamp. The officially certified stamp may also be used for condition certification of nongraded product for Puerto Rico.
6. Prepared From USDA A Grade Poultry (Figure 6) – For use on further processed items produced from Grade A poultry. Either the certificate number or the date of production with the “Prepared From” stamp may be used in conjunction with the U.S. Grade shield.
7. USDA Certified (Figure 7) – For use on further processed items of specific product codes of approved processors under the alternative reprocessing certification program. The USDA certified stamp is used when plant qualified personnel perform and document quality and verification checks of limited verification criteria. The Grader performs limited AQL checks on these criteria according to a set schedule, and normal AQL checks on those criteria not selected by the plant.
8. USDA Verified (Figure 8) - For use on further processed items of specific product codes of approved processors under the alternative reprocessing certification program. The USDA verified stamp is used when plant qualified personnel perform and document quality and verification checks of all verification criteria. The Grader performs limited AQL checks on the product criteria according to a set schedule.