



BEEF, BULLOCK, AND BULL GRADING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

1 Purpose

This Procedure defines all procedures in the classing, grading, and application of official grademarks of beef, bullock, and bull carcasses in accordance with the official grade standards.

2 Scope

Unless amended by this Procedure, Quality Assessment Division (QAD) personnel must adhere to the reference documents listed below.

To simplify, the terms "carcass" and "carcasses" also mean "side" or "sides."

3 References

The following referenced documents are used for the application of this document. The latest edition of the referenced documents (including any amendments) applies.

[Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\), Title 7, Subtitle B, Chapter I, Subchapter C, Part 54 Meats, Prepared Meats, and Meat Products \(Grading, Certification and Standards\)](#)

[United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef](#)

Official U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Marbling Photographs and Marbling Texture Card, per [QAD 112 Procedure: Official Marbling Photographs](#)

[QAD 106 Procedure: Grading Exemptions](#)

[QAD 500 Appendix A: Official Maturity Card](#)

[QAD 506 Procedure: Removal of Incorrect Grademarks](#)

[QAD 515 Procedure: Beef Carcass Instrument Grading Procedures](#)

QAD 1606 Procedure: ABI Meat Grade Volume Entry Processes

4 Applicant Responsibilities

4.1 All animals or products on which QAD is requested to verify or certify breed characteristics must be associated with a breed association recognized by the National Pedigreed Livestock Council (NPLC).

4.2 Provide Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) approved, meat branding ink.



- 4.3 Present carcasses on easily accessible rails without the need for step ladders or stools and/or on moving chains in a manner which eliminates the need for the grader to turn carcasses.
- 4.4 Properly rib carcasses or sides in accordance with the official grade standards a minimum of 10 minutes prior to grading. Improperly ribbed carcasses to be re-offered for grading must be properly ribbed and allowed at least ten minutes bloom time.
- 4.5 Adequately chill carcasses to a range of 32° F to 40° F in the ribeye. Borderline carcasses presented outside this range are not eligible for a supervisory protest.
- 4.6 Adequately illuminate all grading and certification areas with a minimum of 100 foot candle power. Plants cannot protest borderline carcasses presented in areas with less than 100 foot candle power lighting.
- 4.7 If yield grading, the carcass weight must be prominently displayed on the carcass, preferably with ½ inch numbers or larger at a location between the ninth rib and the short loin, sirloin separation point, or on a monitor easily visible to the grader. If the weight tag and/or monitor display is not easily visible, or requires bending or stooping to read, the carcass may not be eligible for yield grading.
- 4.8 If removing kidney, pelvic and heart (KPH) fat, select carcasses for removal and determine the amount to be removed. (See Special Circumstances Concerning Yield Grading for an alternative KPH removal program under Grader Responsibilities in this Procedure). Such carcasses shall be grade identified in the same manner as carcasses with KPH still attached.
- 4.9 If "hot trimming" carcasses, mark or segregate carcasses and identify them to the grader.
- 4.10 Carcasses shall be split into two sides in a manner which allows bone maturity evaluations in the sacral, lumbar and thoracic regions. Mis-split carcasses may not be eligible for grading if an accurate maturity evaluation cannot be made.
- 4.11 For instrumentation grading, refer to Applicant Responsibilities in QAD 515 Procedure: *Beef Carcass Instrument Grading Procedures*.
- 4.12 In multiple grader plants, ensure the graders at least 15 minutes of non-cooler time each time the graders are not on the grading chain. This is so the graders can complete their administrative duties and any required monitoring checks.
- 4.13 When using ribeye paper, remove the ribeye paper prior to having the grader evaluate these carcasses for quality or yield grade determinations.
- 4.14 Provide written documentation to the local QAD Supervisor and graders describing how carcasses over 30 months of age (MOA) are identified and segregated within the plant. If the plant has an approved Quality Systems Assessment (QSA) program in place (e.g., for Export Verification), they should simply provide the applicable section from their quality manual



which details this process. If the plant does not have a QSA in place, they must document this process through a Standard Operating Procedure or similar document. QAD will review these procedures either during routine QSA audits or during supervisory visits.

- 4.15 Ensure the local QAD Supervisor and graders are aware of how carcasses over 30 MOA are identified/marked. The carcasses must be identified in a manner that allows the QAD grader to easily see the identification when presented for grading.
- 4.16 On the implementation date, applicants may only offer carcasses for initial quality and/or yield grading. No carcasses shall be presented for grading that were held as regrades from the previous week.

5 Grading Requirements

- 5.1 Grade only as carcasses in establishments where the animals are harvested or initially chilled, except when an exemption has been granted (QAD 106 Procedure: *Grading Exemptions*).
- 5.2 All carcasses must bear the required inspection mark(s) or be harvested in an FSIS or State approved facility prior to grading or classing.
- 5.3 Retained carcasses shall not be graded without specific authorization from an FSIS inspector.
- 5.4 If both sides are ribbed, the final grade will reflect the "highest" quality and/or yield grades as determined from either qualifying side.
- 5.5 All quality factors shall be determined from the same ribeye.
- 5.6 Official USDA grade factors may be obtained from approved instrumentation grade augmentation systems in accordance with QAD 515 Procedure: *Beef Carcass Instrument Grading Procedures*.
- 5.7 In non-QSA Program plants, QAD Supervision shall review the applicant's SOP described in 4.14 prior to implementation and during routine supervisory visits at least twice a year.

6 Grader Responsibilities

6.1 Classing

- a. Beef (steer, heifer, and cow) require no class identification (QAD 500 Appendix B: *Grade Identification Codes, Grademarks, and Roller Brand for Beef and Bullock Carcasses and Cuts (Option 1)*).
- b. Bullock must be class identified directly above the quality grade stamp (QAD 500 Appendix B: *Grade Identification Codes, Grademarks, and Roller Brand for Beef and Bullock Carcasses and Cuts (Option 1)*); and (QAD 500 Appendix C: *Grade Identification*



Codes, Grademarks, and Roller Brand for Beef and Bullock Carcasses and Cuts (Option 2).)

- c. Bull must be class identified above each yield grade stamp (QAD 500 Appendix D: *Location for Applying Grade Stamps for Bull Carcasses and Cuts (Option 3).*)

6.2 Do Not Grade

- a. In natural light, on loading docks, at cooler doors, on rails from which carcasses may be directly loaded for shipment, or any other area that does not provide an ample opportunity for supervisory review prior to shipment. (Carcasses may be roller branded in loading areas if they have been previously grade identified.)
- b. Carcasses that are not easily accessible or require turning.
- c. Carcasses that are too wet and/or icy to retain a legible grade stamp.

6.3 Do Not Quality Grade

- a. If the cut surface of the ribeye is so dried, aged, frozen or distorted by sawing or ribbing, that the true color, texture, and/or marbling cannot be determined.
- b. If more than a small amount of bloodshot (equal to the minimum slight marbling picture) or calloused tissue (1/2 square inch or more) is in the ribeye.
- c. If the application of pressure, combing, or any other influences altered characteristics of the ribeye to the extent that an accurate grade determination cannot be made.

6.4 Special Circumstances for Quality Grading

Dentition as monitored by the FSIS. Carcasses determined to be less than 30 MOA will be classified as A maturity, and with the exception of dark cutting lean characteristics, the final quality grade will be determined by the degree of marbling. Any under 30 MOA carcasses exhibiting advanced skeletal maturity traits (as described for D and E maturity), will not be eligible for the Prime, Choice, Select or Standard grades and will be graded according to their skeletal, lean and marbling traits accordingly.

6.5 Do Not Yield Grade

- a. When more than minor amounts of fat over the ribeye or other external fat is removed and an accurate adjusted preliminary yield grade (APYG) cannot be made.
- b. If the weight tag is missing, illegible or not prominently displayed.



6.6 Special Circumstances Concerning Yield Grading

- a. If a carcass which has had external fat removed is determined to be eligible for yield grading, the preliminary yield grade (PYG) must be adjusted, if necessary, to reflect what the intact fat cover of the carcass would have been prior to the removal of fat.
- b. If the udder fat has been removed, the APYG will be based entirely on the actual thickness of fat over the ribeye adjusted for irregular fat deposition on other parts of the carcass. The APYG is not adjusted downward based on the removal of udder fat.
- c. Yield grading may be performed immediately following ribbing.
- d. With prior procedural approval from the local QAD grading supervisor, KPH may be removed on the harvest floor and the carcass weighed prior to and following removal. If the adjustment in tenths for the amount of removal is printed on the carcass weight tag, the carcass may be yield graded when presented to the grader as if the KPH were still attached.
- e. If the fat over the ribeye at the 12th-13th ribs has been trimmed on both sides, the carcass is not eligible for yield grading.

6.7 Identification Methods

- a. Only QAD personnel and officially licensed personnel may apply grade and certification stamps. Under special circumstances, plant personnel may apply grade and certification stamps under the direct supervision of QAD personnel. Each instance must be approved in writing in advance by the Grading Services Branch Chief. Plants utilizing approved instrumentation grade augmentation systems must comply with QAD 515 Procedure: *Beef Carcass Instrument Grading Procedures* for applying grade identification marks.
- b. Carcasses or quarters shipped outside the plant location as graded must bear the appropriate designated roller brand or other QAD approved grade identification methods.
- c. Carcasses graded and fabricated at the same plant location have the following options:

Option 1:

Final identification of carcass with pop stamp only or other method approved by the Regional Director (requires an approved FSIS grade label program and grade labeled protective covering, if cuts are marketed with a grade).



Option 2:

Pop stamp carcass and roller brand the entire carcass (round, sirloin, short loin, rib, and chuck) if the grade will be carried forward on all wholesale cuts. It is not necessary to rollerbrand those wholesale cuts that will be marketed as ungraded.

6.8 Roller branding

- a. Graders must personally apply or directly supervise the application of the roller brand.
- b. For beef, combination quality and yield grade rollers or quality only rollers can be used.
- c. Bullock must use the appropriate grade and class roller brand.
- d. Bull is not roller branded.

6.9 Do not roller brand

- a. If the area to be roller branded is obstructed by private tags, order tags, etc.
- b. If more than 50 percent of the area to be roller branded is too wet or frozen to retain a legible roller brand.
- c. Over the inspection stamp or preliminary grade identification stamp.
- d. Over bruised or mutilated areas. In these instances, apply the roller brand to the edge of the nearest unbranded or unbruised portion of the wholesale cut.

6.10 Rebranding

- a. Carcasses or cuts to be rebranded must exhibit previously applied, legible grademarks (pop stamp and/or roller brand).
- b. Positive grade identity must be maintained throughout the process.

6.11 Regrading

QAD 506 Procedure: *Removal of Incorrect Grademarks.*

6.12 Beef grading aids

Beef grading aids are available to USDA personnel from the QAD Office. Non-USDA personnel may purchase beef grading aids from the associations and companies listed in QAD 500 Appendix E: *Beef Grading Aids.*



6.13 Grading Volume Data Reporting

On a daily basis, graders will record grade volume as described in QAD 1606 Procedure:
AMS Billing & Information System (ABI) Meat Grade Volume Entry Processes.

7 **Change Record**

The following changes were made to the August 31, 2018 revision of this document:

- a. Updated QAD 1060 Procedure title for ABI
- b. Replaced slaughter with harvest
- c. Added Section 6.4 Special Circumstances for Quality Grading

Angie Snyder, Acting Director
Quality Assessment Division
Livestock and Poultry Program

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.