



LABELING POULTRY PRODUCTS

Purpose

This instruction defines the requirements for labeling poultry products.

Procedures

Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) regulations require that each shipping container and each immediate container of inspected poultry or poultry products shall bear an approved label which contains certain information as outlined in the Poultry Products Inspection Regulations (9 C.F.R. Part 381). Labeling is the responsibility of FSIS and questions regarding the accuracy and use of any labeling bearing the official grademark should be handled through the Inspector-In-Charge (IIC).

I. Labeling

A. Approval

FSIS regulations permit companies to produce generic labels without submission and to make minor labeling changes to existing labels without resubmission to FSIS. Generically approved labels include labeling for single-ingredient products (such as drums and thighs) which do not contain any special claims, products that have product standards which do not contain any special claims, and products sold under contract specification to Federal Government agencies. Processors are responsible for the content and production of all labels whether generically approved, modified without resubmission, or submitted to FSIS for review and approval. FSIS inspectors are responsible for monitoring product formulation and processing to ensure that all labeling conforms to the general labeling requirements. Verification that labels contain the mandatory features and accurately reflect the finished product is determined periodically through a label-auditing program directed by the Food Labeling Division.

Since many of the poultry labels bearing official grade identification do not require pre-approval, labels bearing the grademark shall be continuously monitored and reviewed by the resident grader(s). Processors are responsible for maintaining records of all labeling used in accordance with 9 C.F.R. Part 381 and must be made available to FSIS personnel or any authorized USDA official upon request. However, these labeling files may be maintained at the headquarters facility of multi-plant companies.

When examining labels, graders should use the following criteria to determine if the label is acceptable:

1. Verify that the product is eligible for grade identification. Cooked and other further processed products generally require the "Prepared From" logo.
2. Verify that the size and shape of the grade shield and the wording associated with grademark are as described in the regulations



3. Computer generated box labels with grade shields are acceptable provided the shield is legible and meets the requirements as listed in 2. above.
4. When labels contain parts that are not eligible for grading along with those that are, the eligible parts must be separated by either a vertical or horizontal line. For example:



2 BREAST QUARTERS
2 LEG QUARTERS
2 THIGHS WITH BACK PORTION

2 LIVERS, 2 GIZZARDS, 2 NECKS
2 STRIPPED BACK PORTIONS

If questions arise concerning the accuracy of labeling, graders shall review the label with the IIC. If the problem is not resolved at this level, grading of product should continue, and the question should be referred to the grader's supervisor. Supervisors will review the problem with the appropriate FSIS supervisory officials for further follow-up. Additionally, they should submit these labels to the National Office, Poultry Staff, Washington, D.C., for review. Along with the label, include any other supportive information.

II. Use of Quality Terms

When approved labels bearing grade designations (i.e., A, B, or C) are used for labeling poultry or poultry products, the product must have been graded by a licensed Quality Assessment Division grader and comply with the indicated grade for the applicable U.S. grade standard. The check-grading of this product will be on the same basis as product labeled with the U.S. grademark [Part 381.129(b)(1)], Meat and Poultry Inspection Regulations.

The use of quality terms such as prime, choice, and select on poultry (whole carcasses or parts) is permitted provided that the poultry is equivalent to U.S. Grade A. Use of quality terms in the possessive form, for example, "Bob's Prime", does not relieve a company of this requirement. Product labeled with the above listed terms and failing to meet U.S. Grade A requirements as determined by checkgrading an official representative sample shall be referred to the IIC for proper product disposition. The use of quality terms on further processed items is evaluated by FSIS on a case-by-case basis. Subjective terms such as fancy, finest, super, supreme, premium, and/or deluxe, etc., may be used unqualified because they are classified as simple advertising adjectives (FSIS Policy Memo 101A).

III. Product Eligible for Official Identification

All poultry classes, kinds, and parts specifically listed in the "Regulations Governing the Voluntary Grading of Poultry Products and Rabbit Products and U.S. Classes, Standards, and Grades" may bear appropriate official grade identification when cut and labeled in accordance with the applicable section of the poultry grading standards. When properly labeled, subject to



special limitations, requirements, etc., the following poultry items may also be officially identified:

A. Tenderloin or Boneless Breasts without Tenderloin

For tenderloin products, the label must state the kind of poultry from which the tenderloin is derived; i.e., turkey tenderloin, roaster tenderloin, etc. The tenderloin is the inner pectoral muscle, which lies alongside the sternum (breastbone).

B. Boneless Breast, Boneless Breasts Halves with or without Tenderloin

Product labeled as breasts/breasts halves, if separated into two approximately equal portions, must be split within one-fourth inch of the keel line.

C. Boneless Breast Quarters (Cut at Right Angle to Long Axis)

D. Breast Quarters with Bone In (Cut at Right Angle to Long Axis)

E. Boneless Thigh Halves (Cut Parallel to Direction of Femur)

F. Breast Halves

Product labeled as breast halves or other wording denoting approximately equal portions must have the sternum (breastbone) split within one-fourth inch of the outer edge.

G. Split Breast, Split Fryers

Product labeled as split breasts, split fryers, or other wording of similar meaning does not require approximate centering of the cut. Such products are eligible for U.S. Grade A identification provided the cut does not mutilate or otherwise detract from the appearance of the product.

H. Skinless, Bone-In Carcasses and Parts

Bone-in products for which grade standards have been established may be officially grade identified in the skinless form provided the product meets all grade standards for conformation, fleshing, discolorations (other than slight discolorations that do not detract from the appearance of the product), disjointed and broken bones, and missing parts. Except for skin adjacent to the hock, pieces of remaining skin will be considered as grade defects regardless of size and number. Skin adjacent to the hock area is permitted provided it does not cover the meat. The wording "skinless" is not required on product without skin. However, when the product is not visible through the packaging, FSIS does require the word "skinless" to be included on the label.

I. Marinated Products



Marinating is a process in which the product is either soaked, massaged, tumbled, or injected with a solution in order to improve taste, tenderness, or other sensory attributes such as color or juiciness. Seasoning is a process in which a dry substance (i.e. salt, pepper) is applied to impart an intended flavoring. Products using clear, semi-clear, or colored marinades, sauces, or seasonings may be identified with the grademark without the “Prepared From” shield provided the ingredients or application process does not alter the U.S. grade or detract from the appearance of the product.

Plant management must demonstrate that the application process does not alter the grade of the final product. Otherwise only the “Prepared From” shield can be used. When product identified with a grademark is graded prior to marinating a cursory examination may take place after the marinating process to ensure it does not negatively affect the product. Adequate documentation and supervisory approval will be required and must be kept in the grader’s files.

IV. Guidelines for Specified Cuts of Poultry

FSIS directive 7110.1 dated February 26, 1986, provides guidance concerning the manner of cut for specific labeling of cut-up poultry parts. The procedures listed below shall be used in conjunction with section 381.170(6) of the Meat and Poultry Inspection Regulations. Products not covered in these guidelines or items carrying “Prepared From” logo, require National Office approval.

A. Breasts

Abdominal muscle (flank meat) shall not be included except for occasional small pieces. Skin or fat from other parts may not be included. The end of the humerus may be included on the breast if the medullary cavity (marrow) of the bone shaft is not exposed. If the medullary cavity of the bone shaft is exposed, then a portion of wing bone is attached and this cut must be labeled as breast with portion of wing bone.

B. Breast with Ribs

Abdominal muscles (flank meat) remaining on the breast shall not extend beyond the midline of the internal side of the sternum (breastbone) when folded inward from its natural attachment to the breast. If this abdominal muscle has been partially cut at its natural attachment to the breast, then the cut edge shall be approximated before folding. Skin or fat from other parts is not allowed. The end of the humerus may be included on the breast if the medullary cavity (marrow) of the bone shaft is not exposed. If the medullary cavity of the bone shaft of the humerus is exposed, then a portion of wing bone is attached and this cut must be labeled as breast with ribs with a portion of wing bone.

C. Proper Cut of Drumsticks, Thighs, and Wings

Thighs, drumsticks, and wings should be separated from other parts with clean cuts through connecting joints. These parts may still be considered properly cut if the medullary cavity



(marrow) of the bone shaft is not exposed and, further, the flesh associated with the part is not mutilated and the meat yield materially affected. The patella (kneecap) may be included on either the drumstick or thigh.

Parts improperly cut as described above are categorized as “miscut” but may be identified as U.S. Grade C if all other Grade C criteria are met. Parts not meeting these or RTC requirements are classified as “no grade.” Legs or drumsticks with attached shank bone exceeding ¼ inch in length are classified as "No Grade."

D. Halves

The regulation, 381.170 b(11) states, that a poultry carcass is cut so as to produce approximately equal right and left sides. The cut must be made so that portions of the backbone remain on both halves, and the cut may be no more than a quarter of an inch from the outer edge of the sternum (breastbone).

E. Legs

The regulation, 381.170 b(6) states, that legs may include pelvic meat but shall not include the pelvic bones. Legs may also include abdominal meat (flank meat) but shall not include rib bones.

F. Leg Quarters

The regulation, 381.170 b(12) states, that a leg quarter consists of a poultry thigh and drumstick with approximately one-half of the associated back portion attached. A leg quarter may also include attached abdominal fat and up to two ribs.

G. Leg Quarters with Back Portions

The cuts identified as leg quarters with back portion include the complete or entire rear back portions attached. In order for this part to be properly labeled, the back portion must have all associated meat and skin. If the meat and skin are missing, this cut should be labeled as leg quarter with stripped back portion. Note: This product is eligible for, and may be identified as, U.S. Grade A when labeled (with stripped back portion) if all other criteria of the grade are met.

H. Thighs

The regulation, 381.170 b(5), states that thighs may include pelvic meat but shall not include the pelvic bone. Thighs may also include abdominal meat (flank meat) and associated skin but shall not include rib bones. Thighs with associated back portion may include up to two ribs. The associated skin shall not be longer than the width of the thigh and shall not extend beyond the thigh meat when folded over the inside of the thigh (meat side). Thighs meeting these criteria may be identified as U.S. Grade A if all other criteria are met.



I. Wing Portions or Sections

Product labeled as wing portions or sections shall consist of second and third segments attached or the second wing segment separately. The portion of the wing attached to the carcass (drummette) is considered the first portion, and the wing tip as the third portion.

J. Skin and Fat

Skin or fat not normally associated with a part may not be included unless stated on the label. Skin is considered excessive when it extends more than 1 ½ inches beyond the meat tissue of the part.

V. Grade Identification of Cut-up Fryers

When parts are assembled in natural proportion on trays or bulk packed and labeled as “cut-up fryer,” “whole fryer cut up,” or similar wording, the whole carcass may be check-graded prior to cutting and the resultant parts eligible for grade identification without further checking. Parts cut from nongraded whole carcasses and assembled and labeled as previously described shall be graded according to the parts standards except for manner of cut. The resulting cut (other than through normal articulate joints) must be smooth without undue mutilation of the meat tissue. The use of the word “parts” in the product labeling; i.e., “fryer parts,” “mixed fryer parts,” “cut-up fryer parts,” or when the parts are specifically labeled, such as “thighs,” “drums,” etc., will require the grading of the product according to the parts standards including manner of cut.

When parts are assembled in natural proportion except for an extra part and labeled as “three-legged fryer,” “double-breasted fryer,” or similar wording, only the identified parts (i.e., legs in a three-legged fryer) will require grading for all grade factors including manner of cut.

VI. Determining The Sex and Class of Ready-to-Cook Turkeys

Sex determination shall be made before grading and packing if stated on the label. When the sex determination is not made before packaging and freezing, the label should read, “Young Turkeys, Yearling Turkeys,” etc.

Turkey parts cut from young turkeys may be labeled as “Turkey Thigh.” The word “young” may be omitted if desired. Yearling or mature turkey parts shall specify the class, that is, “Yearling Turkey Thighs.”

VII. Use of “Prepared From” Labeling

The use of the wording “Prepared From” (or words of similar meaning) in conjunction with the U.S. Grade shield, is limited to raw or further processed products, which have no established grade standards. The following guideline shall be used to monitor this type of grade identification.



A. Supervision Required

The labeling may be applied to applicable products in any plant operating under the supervision of the Quality Assessment Division or FSIS. In poultry processing plants without grading service, coverage necessary to assure proper use of "Prepared From" labeling will be as determined by FSIS. In these instances, the supervisor is required to make supervisory visits a minimum of semi-annually, or more frequently should conditions warrant.

B. Record-Keeping Required

Plants shall maintain, and make available for our review, invoices covering product received. These invoices must itemize and identify, as U.S. Grade A, products being used for "Prepared From" identification. Records shall also be maintained for inplant-produced product.

C. Misuse of "Prepared From" Labeling

The misuse of this labeling; i.e., placing such labels on product not produced from graded poultry, constitutes a violation of the Poultry Products Inspection Act and the Agricultural Marketing Act.

In addition to action taken under authority of the above acts, noncompliance with the requirements of the labeling program may also result in withdrawal of the firm's privilege to identify product with the "Prepared From" identification.

D. Plant Notification of Program Requirements

Plants interested in utilizing "Prepared From" labeling shall have a plan approved by LP to identify segregation and control for products labeled under this program. The approved plan will be reviewed with FSIS IIC. No fee will be charged for this function. In turn, the supervisor shall confirm the program requirements to the resident or nonresident plant, as applicable, requesting its use.

VIII. Transfer of Approved Labeling Material

Approved labeling materials may be transferred from one official plant to another without national office approval. Generally, the IIC at plant level determines whether labels have been officially approved. When labels bearing the official grademark are received from another official plant, the grader at the receiving plant shall check the labels for correct information, form of official grademark, and applicable word description of product to be packed therein. If any label appears incorrect, it must be submitted to the FSIS Labeling Division, Washington, D.C., through the IIC.



IX. Relabeling

Previously graded and identified poultry that is later repackaged with labeling bearing the official grademark, is considered a relabeling process. As such, the primary responsibility to assure truth in labeling rests with FSIS. In plants with resident service, we will work jointly with the FSIS representative to assure grademark integrity when previously graded and identified products are relabeled. When relabeling is performed at locations without grading service supervision, the amount of coverage deemed necessary will be the responsibility of FSIS. Handling of both graded and non-graded product simultaneously, product segregation, and other related considerations will also be at the direction of FSIS. Supervisors are requested to make visits semi-annually, or more frequently if conditions warrant, to non-resident plants to review with the FSIS representative the labeling of previously graded and identified products with the official grademark. No charges shall be made for these visits.

At off-premises freezing locations, labeling on containers is sometimes mutilated or damaged to the extent that it is necessary to relabel the containers. When the firm has provided an approved plan for segregation and control of the product to relabel the product, the IIC at the origin plant may send a supply of approved labels to another inspector or grader at the approved off-premises freezer. In this case, the origin inspector shall send the labels with a memorandum stating the number and kind of labels sent. The inspector or grader at the freezing premises is required to keep the labeling material in a locked room provided by the firm for this purpose only.

Any relabeling at the freezing premises shall be done under the supervision of the inspector or the grader stationed at the freezer. In case there are no authorized personnel at the freezer, the service can be provided on a fee basis through the appropriate grading office. Personnel supervising the relabeling of the product shall examine the product and/or containers to assure its quality and soundness before the relabeling is done. If containers of product are unsound, the grader shall immediately contact his supervisor.

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