



**United States  
Department of  
Agriculture**

**Agricultural  
Marketing  
Service**

**Livestock  
and Seed  
Division**

# **United States Standards for Grades of Slaughter Lambs, Yearlings, and Sheep**

**Effective date July 6, 1992**

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The following is a reprint of the Official United States Standards for the Grades of Slaughter Lambs, Yearlings, and Sheep promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (60 Stat. 1087; 7 U.S.C. 1621-1627) as amended and related authority in the annual appropriation acts for the Department of Agriculture. The standards are reprinted with amendments effective July 6, 1992.

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### **Development of the Standards**

Tentative United States Standards for the Market Classes and Grades of Slaughter Lambs and Sheep were prepared in 1917 to provide a basis on which the Federal Market News Service issue market quotations on these animals, according to a uniform classification. Preliminary grade descriptions were mimeographed and distributed. Suggestions for their improvement were solicited and received from producers, animal husbandmen, market agencies, and slaughterers. These suggestions were used in further perfecting the standards.

Late in 1926 and early 1927, public hearings were held in Portland (OR), San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Denver, Fort Worth, Kansas City, Omaha, St. Paul, Chicago, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Invitations to attend these hearings were sent to livestock producers, slaughterers, wholesale and retail dealers, agricultural college workers, and others interested in the livestock and meat industries. The sentiment developed in these hearings was decidedly in favor of the standardized grades for lambs, yearlings, and sheep, as presented. Criticisms and suggestions brought out in these hearings were given careful consideration in later revisions of the tentative standards which were printed in March 1936, circular No. 383. The circular was slightly revised in July 1940.

The tentative standards for grades of slaughter sheep were revised and promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture as the official United States standards for grades of slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep, effective April 30, 1951. These standards were issued as Service and Regulatory Announcements No. 168. The revisions in the tentative standards, at the time of their promulgation as official standards, combined the Prime and Choice grades and designated them as Prime. The Good grade was renamed as Choice, which also became the highest grade for which slaughter sheep older than yearlings are eligible. The top two-thirds of the Medium grade was renamed Good; the lower one-third of the Medium grade was combined with the upper two-thirds of the Common grade and designated as Utility; and the lower one-third of the Common grade was combined with the Cull grade and designated as Cull. The revisions also provided for indicating in the standards the minimum requirements for each grade and specified the grade requirements at varying degrees of maturity.

In February 1957, revisions were made in the slaughter sheep standards to coordinate them with changes made in the carcass lamb and sheep standards. The quality requirements for the

Prime and Choice grades were reduced for the more mature lambs. In the Good grade, the quality requirements were increased slightly, particularly for very young lambs. Another major change made in the standards was to permit sheep and lambs with quality indications sufficient for only the upper one-third of the Good grade to be graded Choice provided they have at least mid-point Choice conformation.

Following another change in carcasses standards, a further revision was made in June 1960. This major decision lowered both the quality and conformation requirements for the Prime and Choice grades. The conformation requirements in the Prime and Choice grades were lowered about one-half grade. The quality requirements for the very young lambs in both the Prime and Choice grades were reduced about one-half grade; in the more mature lambs, the Prime grade requirements were lowered about one full grade and in the Choice grade about two-thirds of a grade. Other changes limited the extent that superior quality may compensate for deficient conformation.

In March 1969, the standards were revised by adopting yield grade standards for optional use with the quality grades. The yield grades standards were based on the results of studies conducted by the Department, several land-grant universities, and the industry on lamb carcass cutability. Based on that research, and the request of the National Wood Growers Association, the Department proposed in the yield grades on August 16, 1968, and they became effective on March 1, 1969. Changes also were made in the "Application of Standards" section as needed to implement the yield grades and to clarify some other points. No changes were made in the quality grade standards.

In November 1984, changes were once again made in the slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep standards to coordinate them with previous changes in the carcass grade standards. Several of those changes did not necessitate corresponding changes in the slaughter standards. However, changes were necessary in the rate of quality and conformation compensations, muscling descriptions were added to the conformation descriptions for each grade, and the Cull grade was dropped for lambs and yearlings. These changes also necessitated splitting the yearlings and sheep into two separate specifications since the Cull grade was no longer applicable to the yearlings.

When the carcass standards were revised in July 1992, the standards for slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep were once again revised to reflect those changes. The changes made were "coupling" of the quality and yield grades to require that carcasses be identified for both quality and yield when officially graded, and to require removal of most of the kidney and pelvic fat prior to grading. In addition, leg conformation score was eliminated as a yield grade factor and the fat thickness range in each yield grade was shifted and narrowed. The slaughter standards were revised to reflect those changes in the carcass standards. These changes were initiated in response to requests from producers--represented by the American Sheep Industry (ASI) Association--to provide an improved communication tool to efficiently reflect consumers' preferences for lean meat products back to producers. The changes officially proposed on November 20, 1991, and were overwhelmingly supported by all industry segments except lamb feeders and lamb slaughterers and processors. Those two segments of the industry were split on the changes. The revised standards were effective on July 6, 1992.

### **§53.130 Market sheep.**

The official standards for market sheep, developed by the United States Department of Agriculture, provide for segregation according to (a) use as slaughter animals or feeders; (b) class or sex conditions; (c) age group; and (d) grade, which is determined by the apparent relative excellence and desirability of the individual animal for a particular use.

### **§53.131 Slaughter classes and market groups.**

The classes of slaughter sheep are ram, ewe, and wether; the age groups are lambs, yearlings, and sheep. Definitions of the respective classes and age groups are as follows:

- (a) *Ram*. A ram is an uncastrated male ovine.
- (b) *Ewe*. A ewe is a female ovine.
- (c) *Wether*. A male ovine castrated when young and prior to developing the secondary physical characteristics of a ram.
- (d) *Lamb*. A lamb is an immature ovine, usually under 14 months of age, that has not cut its first pair of permanent incisor teeth.
- (e) *Yearling*. A yearling is an ovine usually between one and two years of age, that has cut its first pair of permanent incisor teeth but has not cut the second pair.
- (f) *Sheep*. A sheep is an ovine, usually over 24 months of age, that has cut its second pair of permanent incisor teeth.

### **§53.132 Application of standards.**

(a) *Grade factors*. Grades of slaughter ovines are intended to be directly related to the grades of the carcasses they produce. To accomplish this, these slaughter ovine grade standards are based on factors which are directly related to the quality grades and yield grades of ovine carcasses. The standards are written so that the quality and yield grade standards are contained in separate sections. The quality grade standards are further divided into three sections applicable to slaughter lambs, slaughter yearlings, and slaughter sheep. There are four quality grades within each class -- Prime, Choice, Good, and Utility for lambs and yearlings; and Choice, Good, Utility, and Cull for sheep. Also, there are five yield grades applicable to all classes of slaughter ovine, denoted by numbers 1 through 5, with Yield Grade 1 representing the highest degree of cutability. When officially graded slaughter ovines are identified for both quality and yield grades.

(b) *General principles*. (1) The determination of the carcass grade that the slaughter animal will produce requires the exercise of well-regulated judgment. Each animal presents a different combination of the grade-determining factors. Animals frequently have characteristics associated with two or more grades. Therefore, a composite evaluation of all inherent physical characteristics is essential for accuracy in determining grade.

(2) The accurate determination of the grade of a slaughter ovine requires handling in addition to visual observation. The length and density of the fleece vary greatly with individuals, and the thickness and firmness of the flesh covering of woolled ovine can only be roughly estimated without handling. The technique used in handling usually varies with the degree of precision in

mind as well as the experience of the grader. Experienced graders may find one quick handling satisfactory. This usually consists of placing the one open hand over the back and ribs in simultaneous motion. The thumb extends just over the backbone, while the fingers, which are held close together, cover the rib section, and pressure is applied very lightly with a slight lateral and forward and backward motion. The generally accepted technique of handling ovines where time permits, and especially when noting slight differences between individuals, is to handle forward from the dock to neck with the open hand, fingers together, laid flat and with a slight lateral motion. Both hands may be used, one on each side, in a similar manner to determine the fleshing over the shoulders, ribs, and hips. Regardless of the method, considerable experience is necessary in handling ovine to accurately determine the grade.

(c) *Quality grades.* (1) The quality grade of a slaughter ovine is determined by a composite evaluation of two general considerations which influence carcass excellence: conformation and quality -- fatness, maturity, and other indicators of differences in palatability of the lean flesh.

(2) Conformation refers to the general body proportions of the animal and to the ratio of meat to bone. Although primarily determined by the inherent muscular and skeletal systems, it is also influenced by the degree of fatness. However, external fat in excess of that normally left on retail cuts is not considered in evaluating conformation. The conformation descriptions included in each of the grade specifications refer to the thickness of muscling and to an overall degree of thickness and fullness of the animal. Slaughter ovines which meet the requirements for thickness of muscling specified for a grade will be considered to have conformation adequate for that grade despite the fact that, because of a lack of fatness, they may not have the overall degree of thickness and fullness described. Conformation is evaluated by averaging the conformation of the various component parts, giving special consideration to those parts of the body producing the more desirable cuts of meat -- loin, hotel rack, and leg.

(3) In grading slaughter ovines, quality of the lean must be evaluated indirectly by considering the quantity, distribution, and type of fat or finish in relation to the maturity of the animal being graded. Finish is evaluated by noting variations in the fullness and apparent thickness of the fat covering over the back, loin, ribs, and legs. A high degree of desirable finish is evidenced by a firm, smooth layer of fat which is uniformly distributed over the body. To be eligible for the Prime or Choice grades, a slaughter ovine must have at least a very thin covering of external fat over the top of the shoulders and the outside of the legs, and the back must have at least a thin (approximately 0.07 inch) covering of fat.

(4) Although the market designation of slaughter ovines is usually made by classes, the quality standards are intended to apply to all classes without regard to sex condition. However, male animals which have thick, heavy necks and shoulders typical of uncastrated males are discounted in grade in proportion to the extent to which these characteristics are developed. Such discounts may vary from less than one-half a grade in young lambs in which such characteristics are barely noticeable, to as much as two full grades in mature rams in which such characteristics are very pronounced.

(d) *Yield grades.* (1) The yield grades for slaughter ovines (like the grades for ovine carcasses) are based on the thickness of fat over the ribeye. As the amount of external fat increases, the percent of retail cuts decreases and the numerical yield grade increases. The adjusted fat thickness range for each yield grade is as follows: Yield Grade 1 -- 0.00 to 0.15 inch; Yield Grade

2 -- 0.16 to 0.25 inch; Yield Grade 3 -- 0.26 to 0.35 inch; Yield Grade 4 -- 0.36 to 0.45 inch; and Yield Grade 5 -- 0.46 inch and greater. On slaughter ovines which do not have a normal distribution of external fat, the fat thickness estimate over the ribeye may be adjusted, as necessary, to reflect unusual amounts of fat on other parts of the animal. In fact an evaluation of overall fatness, or direct estimation of yield grade may be preferred by experienced evaluators.

(2) The overall fatness of an animal can be determined best by giving particular attention to those parts on which fat is deposited at a faster-than-average rate. These include the back, loin, rump, flank, breast, and cod or udder. As ovines increase in fatness these parts become progressively fuller, thicker, and more distended in relation to the thickness and fullness of the other parts, particularly the legs. However, since an animal's thickness of muscling also affects the development of its various parts, this also needs to be considered when evaluating the degree of fatness. In thinly muscled ovines with a low degree of finish, the width of the back usually will be greater than the width through the center of the legs. Conversely, in thickly muscled ovines with a low degree of finish, the thickness through the legs will be greater than through the back and the back will be full and rounded. At an intermediate degree of fatness, ovine which are thinly muscled will be considerably wider through the back than through the leg and will be nearly flat across the back. Thickly muscled ovines that have an intermediate degree of fatness will be about the same width through the legs as through the back and the back will appear only slightly rounded. Very fat ovines will be wider through the back than through the legs, but this difference will be greater in thinly muscled ovines than in those that are thickly muscled. As ovines increase in fatness, they also become deeper bodied because of large deposits of fat in the flanks and breast and along the underline.

(e) *Other considerations.* (1) Other factors, such as sex, heredity, and management also may affect the development of grade-determining characteristics in slaughter ovines. Although these factors do not lend themselves to descriptions in the standards, the use of factual information of this nature is justified in determining the grade of slaughter ovines. The ability to make proper allowances for the effects of genetic and management factors on the appearance of grade-determining characteristics must be developed through experience.

(2) Slaughter ovines qualifying for any particular grade may vary with respect to the relative development of their individual grade factors. In fact, some will qualify for a particular grade although they have some characteristics more typical of ovine in another grade. Because it is impractical to describe the nearly infinite number of such recognizable combinations of characteristics, the standards describe only ovines which have a relatively similar development of the various quality and yield grade-determining factors and which are near the lower limits of quality or yield for the grade. However, examples of the extent to which superiority in quality-indicating characteristics may compensate for deficiencies in conformation, and vice versa, are indicated for each quality grade. In the slaughter lamb quality grade standards, the requirements are given for two maturity groups. In the yield grade standards, fat thickness descriptions are given for slaughter ovines which are near the maximum fatness for each of the first four yield grades.

### §53.133 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of slaughter lambs (quality).

(a) *Prime*. (1) Slaughter lambs having minimum conformation requirements for the Prime grade tend to be thickly muscled throughout, and they are moderately wide and thick in relation to their length and height. They are moderately wide over the back, loin, and rump. Shoulders and hips are usually moderately smooth. The twist is moderately deep and full, and the legs are moderately large and plump. They generally present a well-rounded appearance due to a slight fullness or plumpness over the crops, loins, and rump. Relatively young lambs, under seven months of age, tend to have a moderately thin fat covering over the back, ribs, loins, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are readily discernible. Older, more mature lambs have a slightly thin fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are slightly discernible. Prime grade lambs exhibit evidences of rather high quality. The bones tend to be proportionately small, the joints tend to be smooth, and the body tends to be smooth and symmetrical.

(2) To qualify for the Prime grade, a lamb must possess the minimum qualifications for finish regardless of the extent that its conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Prime. However, a development of finish which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Prime grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified for Prime as indicated in the following example: A lamb which has evidences of finish equivalent to the midpoint of the Prime grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Choice grade and remain eligible for Prime. However, in no instance may a lamb be graded Prime which has a development of conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade.

(b) *Choice*. (1) Slaughter lambs having minimum conformation requirements for the Choice grade are slightly thick muscled throughout, and they tend to be slightly wide and thick in relation to their length and height. They tend to be slightly wide over the back, loin, and rump. The shoulders and hips are usually slightly smooth but may exhibit a slight tendency toward prominence. The twist tends to be slightly deep and full, and the legs tend to be slightly thick and plump. Relatively young lambs, under seven months of age, have a thin fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are moderately prominent. Older, mature lambs have a moderately thin fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are slightly prominent. Choice grade lambs usually present a moderately refined appearance.

(2) A development of quality which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified as minimum for Choice as indicated in the following example: A lamb which has evidences of quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Choice grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Good grade and remain eligible for Choice. However, in no instance may a lamb be graded Choice which has a development of conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade. Also, a lamb which has conformation at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade may qualify for Choice with a development of quality equivalent to the lower limit of the upper one-third of the Good grade. Compensation of superior conformation for inferior quality is limited to one-third grade of

deficient quality.

(c) *Good*. (1) Slaughter lambs having minimum conformation requirements for the Good grade are slightly thin muscled throughout, and are moderately narrow in relation to their length and height and are slightly narrow over the back, loin, and rump. Hips and shoulders are moderately prominent. The twist is slightly shallow and the legs are slightly small and thin. Relatively young lambs, under seven months of age, have slightly more than a very thin, uneven fat covering over the back, loin, and upper ribs. In handling, the shoulders, backbone, hips, and ribs are prominent. Older, more mature lambs have slightly more than a thin fat covering over the back, ribs, and loin. In handling, the bones of the shoulders, backbone, hips, and ribs are rather prominent. Good grade lambs may present evidences of slightly low quality. The bones and joints are usually moderately large, and the body is somewhat lacking in symmetry and smoothness.

(2) A development of quality which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified as minimum for Good as indicated in the following example: A lamb which has evidences of quality at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may have conformation equivalent to the minimum for the upper one-third of the Utility grade and remain eligible for Good. However, in no instance may a lamb be graded Good which has a development of conformation inferior to the minimum for the upper one-third of the Utility grade. Also, a lamb which has conformation at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may qualify for Good with a development of quality equivalent to the lower limit of the upper one-third of the Utility grade. Compensation of superior conformation for inferior quality is also limited to one-third grade of deficient quality.

(d) *Utility*. The Utility grade consists of those lambs whose characteristics are inferior to those specified as minimum for the Good grade.

### **§53.134 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of slaughter yearlings (quality).**

(a) *Prime*. (1) Slaughter yearlings having minimum conformation requirements for the Prime grade tend to be thickly muscled throughout, and are moderately wide and thick in relation to their length and height, and they are moderately wide over the back, loin, and rump. Shoulders and hips are usually moderately smooth. The twist is moderately deep and full, and the legs are moderately large and plump. There is a rather distinct fullness or plumpness evident over the crops, loins, and rump which contributes to a well-rounded appearance. There is a slightly thick fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are hardly discernible. Prime grade slaughter yearlings exhibit evidences of rather high quality. The bones tend to be proportionately small, the joints tend to be smooth, and the body tends to be smooth and symmetrical.

(2) Regardless of the extent to which its conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Prime, a yearling must have minimum Prime quality to be eligible for the Prime grade. However, a development of quality which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Prime grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified as minimum for Prime as indicated in the following example: A yearling which has evidences of quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Prime grade may have conformation

equivalent to the midpoint of the Choice grade and remain eligible for Prime. However, in no instance may a yearling be graded Prime which has a development of conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade.

(b) *Choice*. (1) Slaughter yearlings having minimum conformation requirements for the Choice grade are slightly thick muscled throughout, and they tend to be slightly wide and thick in relation to their length and height, and they tend to be slightly wide over the back, loin, and rump. The shoulders and hips are usually slightly smooth but may show a slight tendency toward prominence. The twist tends to be slightly deep and full, and the legs tend to be slightly thick and plump. They have a slightly thin fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are readily discernible. Choice grade slaughter yearlings usually present a moderately refined appearance.

(2) A development of quality which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified as minimum for Choice as indicated in the following example: A yearling which has evidences of quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Choice grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Good grade and remain eligible for Choice. However, in no instance may a yearling be graded Choice which has a development of conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade. Also, a yearling which has a development of conformation at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade may qualify for Choice with a development of quality equivalent to the lower limit of the upper one-third of the Good grade. Compensation of superior conformation for inferior quality is limited to one-third grade of deficient quality.

(c) *Good*. (1) Slaughter yearlings having minimum conformation requirements for the Good grade are slightly thin muscled throughout, and are moderately narrow in relation to their length and height, and are slightly narrow over the back, loin, and rump. Hips and shoulders are moderately prominent. The twist is slightly shallow, and the legs are slightly small and thin. They have slightly more than a moderately thin fat covering over the back, loin, and upper ribs. In handling, the shoulders, backbone, hips, and ribs are rather prominent. Good grade yearlings may present evidences of slightly low quality. The body is somewhat lacking in symmetry and smoothness.

(2) A development of quality which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified as minimum for Good as indicated in the following example: A yearling which has evidences of quality at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may have conformation equivalent to the minimum for the upper one-third of the Utility grade and remain eligible for Good. However, in no instance may a yearling be graded Good which has a development of conformation inferior to the minimum for the upper one-third of the Utility grade. Also, a yearling which has conformation at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may qualify for Good with a development of quality equivalent to the lower limit of the upper one-third of the Utility grade. Compensation of superior conformation for inferior quality is also limited to one-third grade of deficient quality.

(d) *Utility*. The Utility grade includes those yearlings whose characteristics are inferior to those specified as minimum for the Good grade.

**§53.135 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of slaughter sheep (quality).**

(a) *Choice*. (1) Slaughter sheep having minimum conformation requirements for the Choice grade are slightly thick muscled throughout, and they tend to be slightly wide and thick in relation to their length and height, and they tend to be slightly wide over the back, loin, and rump. The shoulders and hips are usually slightly smooth but may show a slight tendency toward prominence. The twist tends to be slightly deep and full, and the legs tend to be slightly thick and plump. They have a slightly thick fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. In handling, the backbone and ribs are slightly discernible. Choice grade slaughter sheep usually present a moderately refined appearance.

(2) A development of quality which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified as minimum for Choice as indicated in the following example: A sheep which has evidences of quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Choice grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Good grade and remain eligible for Choice. However, in no instance may a sheep be graded Choice which has a development of conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade. Also, a sheep which has conformation at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Choice grade may qualify for Choice with a development of quality equivalent to the lower limit of the upper one-third of the Good grade. Compensation of superior conformation for inferior quality is limited to one-third grade of deficient quality.

(b) *Good*. (1) Slaughter sheep having minimum conformation requirements for the Good grade are slightly thin muscled throughout, and are moderately narrow in relation to their length and height, and they are slightly narrow over the back, loin, and rump. Hips and shoulders are moderately prominent. The twist is slightly shallow, and the legs are slightly small and thin. They have a slightly thin fat covering over the back, ribs, and loin. In handling, the bones of the shoulders, backbone, hips, and ribs are slightly prominent. Good grade sheep may present evidences of slightly low quality. The body is somewhat lacking in symmetry and smoothness.

(2) A development of quality which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified as minimum for Good as indicated in the following example: A sheep which has evidences of quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Good grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Utility grade and remain eligible for Good. However, in no instance may a sheep be graded Good which has a development of conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Utility grade. Also, a sheep which has conformation at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may qualify for Good with a development of quality equivalent to the lower limit of the upper one-third of the Utility grade. Compensation of superior conformation for inferior quality is limited to one-third grade of deficient quality.

(c) *Utility*. (1) Slaughter sheep having minimum conformation requirements for the Utility grade are thinly muscled throughout, and are very angular and very narrow in relation to their length and height, and they are very thin fleshed, very narrow over the back, loin, and rump, and very shallow in the twist. The hips are very prominent, and the shoulders are usually open, rough,

and prominent. The legs are very small and thin and present a slightly concave appearance. Utility grade slaughter sheep show no visible evidences of fat covering. In handling, the bones of the shoulders, backbone, hips, and ribs are so thinly covered that they are very prominent. Utility grade slaughter sheep are of rather low quality. The bones and joints are proportionately large, and the body is very rough and unsymmetrical.

(2) A development of quality which is superior to that specified as minimum for the Utility grade may compensate, on an equal basis, for a development of conformation which is inferior to that specified as minimum for Utility as indicated in the following example: A sheep which has evidences of quality at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Utility grade may have conformation equivalent to the minimum for the upper one-third of the Cull grade and remain eligible for Utility. However, in no instance may a sheep be graded Utility which has a development of conformation inferior to the minimum for the upper one-third of the Cull grade. Also, a sheep which has conformation at least one-third grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Utility grade may qualify for Utility with a development of quality equivalent to the lower limit of the upper one-third of the Cull grade. Compensation of superior conformation for inferior quality is also limited to one-third grade of deficient quality.

(d) *Cull*. (1) The Cull grade includes those slaughter sheep whose characteristics are inferior to those specified as minimum for the Utility grade.

### **§53.136 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep (yield).**

(a) *Yield Grade 1*. Yield Grade 1 slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep produce carcasses which have very high yields of boneless retail cuts. Ovines with characteristics qualifying them for the lower limits of Yield Grade 1 (near the borderline between Yield Grade 1 and Yield Grade 2) will have only a slightly thin covering of external fat over the back, loin, and ribs, and a slightly thick covering of fat over the rump. They are slightly shallow through the flanks and the brisket and cod or udder have some evidence of fullness. In handling, the backbone, ribs, and ends of bones at the loin edge are slightly prominent. A carcass produced from slaughter ovines of this description might have 0.15 inch of fat over the ribeye.

(b) *Yield Grade 2*. Yield Grade 2 slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep produce carcasses with high yields of boneless retail cuts. Ovines with characteristics qualifying them for the lower limits of Yield Grade 2 (near the borderline between Yield Grade 2 and Yield Grade 3) will have a slightly thick layer of external fat over the back, loin and ribs, and a thick covering of fat over the rump. They tend to be slightly deep and full through the flanks and the brisket and cod or udder are moderately full. In handling, the backbone, ribs, and ends of bones at the loin edge are readily discernible. A carcass produced from slaughter ovines of this description might have 0.25 inch of fat over the ribeye.

(c) *Yield Grade 3*. Yield Grade 3 slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep produce carcasses with intermediate yields of boneless retail cuts. Ovines with characteristics qualifying them for the lower limits of Yield Grade 3 (near the borderline between Yield Grade 3 and Yield Grade 4) will have a thick covering of fat over the back and loin and a very thick covering of fat over the rump and down over the ribs. The flanks are deep and full and the brisket and cod or udder are full. In

handling, the backbone, ribs, and ends of bones at the loin edge are difficult to distinguish. A carcass produced from slaughter ovines of this description might have 0.35 inch of fat over the ribeye.

(d) *Yield Grade 4.* Yield Grade 4 slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep produce carcasses with moderately low yields of boneless retail cuts. Ovines with characteristics qualifying them for the lower limits of Yield Grade 4 (near the borderline between Yield Grade 4 and Yield Grade 5) will have a very thick covering of fat over the back and loin, and an extremely thick covering of fat over the rump and down over the ribs. The flanks are moderately deep and full and the brisket and cod or udder are full. In handling, the backbone, ribs, and ends of bones at the loin edge are not discernible. A carcass produced from slaughter ovines of this description might have 0.45 inch of fat over the ribeye.

(e) *Yield Grade 5.* Yield Grade 5 slaughter lambs, yearlings, and sheep produce carcasses with low yields of boneless retail cuts. Ovines of this grade consist of those not meeting the minimum requirements of Yield Grade 4 because of more fat.