



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

**Agricultural
Marketing
Service**

**Livestock
and Seed
Division**

United States Standards for Grades of Vealers and Slaughter Calves

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The following is a reprint of the official United States Standards for the grades of vealers and slaughter calves promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (60 Stat. 1087; as amended; 7 U.S.C. 1621-1627). These standards are reprinted with amendments effective January 1, 1972.

Development of the Standards

The official United States standards for grades of vealers and slaughter calves were initially promulgated on July 16, 1928.

The official standards were amended in March 1951. The amendment specified the minimum requirements for each grade and provided for the renaming of certain grades of vealers and calves to conform with the amended standards for veal and calf carcasses which became effective at the same time. Major changes brought about by this amendment were as follows: The Prime and Choice grades were combined and redesignated Prime, the Good grade was renamed Choice, the top half of the Medium grade was renamed choice, the top half of the Medium grade was designated Commercial, and the Common grade was renamed utility. The Cull grade remained unchanged. Other minor changes were made to facilitate interpretation.

The official standards were again amended in October 1956 by changing the grade name Commercial to Standard. This change was made to conform with a corresponding change in grade names for veal and calf carcasses which also became effective at the same time.

In January 1972 the vealer and slaughter calf grade standards were revised to reflect the change made in the veal and calf carcass grade standards effective January 1, 1972. This change increased the emphasis placed on the color of the lean in differentiating between veal and calf carcasses and reduced the conformation requirements for all grades of veal and calf a full grade. Also, the change reduced the quality requirements for veal approximately one-half grade for the Prime grade and approximately one-full grade for the Choice, good, and Standard grades. For calf, however, the reduction in the quality requirements varied from approximately one-half grade for Prime and approximately a full grade for Choice, Good, and Standard for the youngest carcasses included in the calf class to no change in these requirements for the most mature carcasses classed as a calf. Additionally, the Cull grade was eliminated with the result that the Utility grade included all veal and calf whose characteristics were inferior to those specified as minimum for the Standard grade.

§53.120 Differentiation between vealers and calves.

Young bovine animals are segregated for market purposes as vealers or calves and this differentiation is intended to reflect the kind of carcass (veal or calf) they will produce. The differentiation between veal and calf carcasses is based very largely on the color of their lean and this

is determined almost entirely by the extent to which the animal's diet has consisted of milk or a milk replacer. Therefore, the differentiation between vealers and calves is based primarily on evidences of type of feeding and age. Vealers that have subsisted largely on milk usually are less than 3 months of age. However, animals that have been raised on milk replacer rations frequently will be considerably more mature. In no case, though, may such an animal be considered a vealer if its evidences of maturity indicate that it is too mature to be classed as calf. Since vealers have consumed little, if any, roughages, they have the characteristic trimness of middle associated with limited paunch development. Calves are usually between 3 and 8 months of age, have subsisted partially or entirely on feeds other than milk or milk replacers for a substantial period of time, and have developed the heavier middles and other physical characteristics associated with maturity beyond the vealer stage.

§53.121 Classes of vealers and calves.

There are three classes of vealers and calves, based on sex condition -- steers, heifers, and bulls. While recognition may sometimes be given to these different classes on the market, especially bull calves approaching beef in maturity, the market desirability of all three classes is sufficiently similar to permit them to be graded on the same standards.

§53.122 Application of standards.

(a) The grade of a vealer or slaughter calf is determined by a composite evaluation of two general considerations which influence carcass excellence: (1) Conformation and (2) fatness, maturity, and other factors responsible for differences in quality of the lean flesh.

(b) 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. Excellent conformation in vealers and slaughter calves is denoted by a wide-topped, straight-lined, thick-fleshed individual that is deep and full in the twist.

(c) In grading vealers and slaughter calves, quality of the lean flesh must necessarily be evaluated indirectly from consideration, primarily, of the quantity, distribution, and type of fat or finish. Limited consideration is also given to such factors as the refinement of hair, hide, and bone and the smoothness and symmetry of the body. Finish is evaluated by noting variations in fullness in the brisket, flanks, and cod or udder and the apparent thickness of the fat covering over the back, loin, ribs, and legs.

(d) Since relatively few vealers or calves have an identical development of conformation and quality, it is obvious that each grade will include animals having various combinations of these two characteristics. Examples of how conformation and quality are combined into the final quality grade are included in each of the grade descriptions. However, the principles governing the compensation of variations in development of quality and conformation are as follows: In each of the grades superior quality is permitted to compensate for deficient conformation, without limit. The reverse type of compensation -- superior conformation for inferior quality -- is not permitted in the Prime and Choice grades. To qualify for one of these grades, a slaughter animal must have the minimum requirements specified for quality regardless of how much the conformation may exceed the minimum specified. In all other grades, such compensation is permitted but only to the extent of one-third of

a grade of deficient quality. For both types of compensation, the rate of compensation is equal -- a given degree of superior quality compensates for the same degree of deficient conformation and vice versa.

(e) Other factors -- such as heredity and management -- also may affect the development of grade-determining characteristics in vealers and calves. 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 vealers and slaughter calves.

(f) Vealers or calves qualifying for any particular grade may vary with respect to the relative development of the individual grade factors. In fact, some will qualify for a particular grade although they have some characteristics more nearly typical of animals of another grade. Because it is impractical to describe the nearly infinite number of such recognizable combinations of characteristics, the standards described only vealers and calves which have a relatively similar development of individual conformation and quality factors and which are also representative of the lower limits of each grade.

§53.123 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of vealers.

(a) *Prime.* (1) Vealers possessing minimum qualifications for the Prime grade tend to be moderately thick muscled throughout. They are moderately wide over the back and loin, and shoulders and hips are usually moderately neat and smoothly laid in, with only a slight tendency toward prominence. The loin, rump, and rounds appear almost flat, with little evidence of fullness. Prime grade vealers tend to have a very thin fat covering over the back, loin, and upper ribs. The brisket, rear flanks, and cod or udder are slightly full. Prime grade vealers usually present a moderately refined appearance.

(2) To qualify for the Prime grade, vealers must possess the minimum evidences of quality specified regardless of the extent to which their conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Prime. However, quality superior to that specified as the minimum for the Prime grade may compensate, without limit, for conformation inferior to that specified as the minimum for Prime at the rate indicated in the following example: Vealers which have 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.

(b) *Choice.* (1) Vealers possessing minimum qualifications for Choice tend to be slightly thick muscled throughout. They are slightly wide over the back and loin, the shoulders and hips are slightly prominent, and the neck is slightly long and thin. The loin, rump, and rounds have a very slightly sunken or hollowed-out appearance. The fat covering is very limited and is discernible only over portions of the back and loin. The brisket, rear flanks, and cod or udder have small fat deposits but have no apparent fullness. Choice grade vealers are usually moderately smooth and slightly refined in appearance.

(2) To qualify for the Choice grade, vealers must possess the minimum evidences of quality specified regardless of the extent to which their conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Choice. However, quality which is superior to that specified as the minimum for the Choice grade may compensate, without limit, for conformation which is inferior to that specified as the minimum for Choice at the rate indicated in the following example: Vealers which have 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.

(c) *Good*. (1) Vealers possessing minimum requirements for the Good grade tend to be thinly muscled throughout. They are narrow over the back, loin, and rump and shallow in the twist. They have a distinctly sunken or hollowed-out appearance over the back, loin, and rounds. Hips and shoulders appear moderately prominent. There is practically no fat covering on any part of the animal's body. Such vealers may show the heavy bones, thick hide, prominent hips and shoulders associated with coarseness, or they may show the small bones, tight hide, and angularity denoting overrefinement.

(2) Quality superior to that specified as the minimum for the Good grade may compensate, without limit, for conformation inferior to that specified as the minimum for Good at the rate indicated in the following example: Vealers with quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Good grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Standard grade and remain eligible for Good. Also, vealers with conformation at least one-third of a grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may have quality equal to the lower limit of the upper third of the Standard grade and remain eligible for Good.

(d) *Standard*. (1) Vealers possessing minimum requirements for the Standard grade tend to be very thinly muscled throughout and tend to be very narrow over the back, loin, and rump and very shallow in the twist. Hips and shoulders are very prominent, and the crops, back, loin, rump, and rounds present a very sunken or hollowed-out appearance. They show no evidence of any fat covering. Standard vealers tend to be of low quality. The bones and joints are usually disproportionately large and the hide is either thick or tight and inelastic.

(2) Quality superior to that specified as minimum for the Standard grade may compensate, without limit, for conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Standard grade at the rate indicated in the following example: Vealers with quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Standard grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Utility grade and remain eligible for Standard. Also, vealers with conformation at least one-third of a grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Standard grade may have quality equal to the lower limit of the upper third of the Utility grade and remain eligible for Standard.

(e) *Utility*. The Utility grade includes vealers whose characteristics are inferior to those specified as minimum for the Standard grade.

§53.124 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of slaughter calves.

(a) *Prime*. (1) Calves possessing minimum qualifications for the Prime grade tend to be moderately thick muscled throughout. They are moderately wide over the back and loin, and shoulders and hips are usually moderately neat and smoothly laid in. There is a slight fullness or plumpness over the crops, loin, rump, and rounds which contributes to a rather well-rounded appearance. Prime grade calves tend to have a slightly thick fat covering over the back, loin, rump, and upper ribs. The brisket, rear flanks, and cod or udder are moderately full. Prime grade calves usually present a moderately refined appearance.

(2) To qualify for the Prime grade, slaughter calves must possess the minimum evidences of quality specified regardless of the extent to which their conformation may exceed the minimum

requirements for Prime. However, quality superior to that specified as the minimum for the Prime grade may compensate, without limit, for conformation inferior to that specified as the minimum for Prime at the rate indicated in the following example: Slaughter calves which have 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.

(b) *Choice*. (1) Calves possessing minimum qualifications for the Choice grade tend to be slightly thick muscled throughout. They are slightly wide over the back and loin. The neck is slightly long and thin. The loin, rump, and rounds are almost flat and have little or no evidence of fullness. The shoulders and hips are moderately neat and smoothly laid in but may appear slightly prominent. There is a thin fat covering over the back, loin, and upper ribs. The brisket, rear flanks, and cod or udder tend to be slightly full. Choice grade calves are usually moderately smooth and slightly refined in appearance.

(2) To qualify for the Choice grade, slaughter calves must possess the minimum evidences of quality specified regardless of the extent to which their conformation may exceed the minimum requirements for Choice. However, quality which is superior to that specified as the minimum for the Choice grade may compensate, without limit, for conformation which is inferior to that specified as the minimum for Choice at the rate indicated in the following example: Slaughter calves which have 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.

(c) *Good*. (1) Calves possessing minimum requirements for the Good grade tend to be thinly muscled throughout. They are narrow over the back, loin, and rump and shallow in the twist and have a slightly sunken or hollowed-out appearance over the back, loin, and rounds. Hips and shoulders appear somewhat prominent. There is a very thin fat covering that is discernible only over the back and loin. Such calves may show the heavy bones, thick hide, prominent hips and shoulders associated with coarseness; or they may show the small bones, tight hide, and angularity denoting overrefinement.

(2) Quality superior to that specified as the minimum for the Good grade may compensate, without limit, for conformation inferior to that specified as the minimum for Good at the rate indicated in the following example: Calves with quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Good grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Standard grade and remain eligible for Good. Also, calves with conformation at least one-third of a grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Good grade may have quality equal to the lower limit of the upper third of the Standard grade and remain eligible for Good.

(d) *Standard*. (1) Calves possessing minimum requirements for the Standard grade tend to be very thinly muscled throughout and are very narrow over the back, loin, and rump, and very shallow in the twist. Hips and shoulders are very prominent and the crops, back loin, rump, and rounds present a very sunken or hollowed-out appearance. There is practically no fat on any part of the animal's body. The bones and joints are usually disproportionately large, and the hide is either thick or tight and inelastic.

(2) Quality superior to that specified as minimum for the Standard grade may compensate, without limit, for conformation inferior to that specified as minimum for the Standard grade at the rate indicated in the following example: Calves with quality equivalent to the midpoint of the Standard grade may have conformation equivalent to the midpoint of the Utility grade and remain eligible for

Standard. Also, calves with conformation at least one-third of a grade superior to that specified as minimum for the Standard grade may have quality equal to the lower limit of the upper third of the Utility grade and remain eligible for Standard.

(e) *Utility*. The Utility grade includes slaughter calves whose characteristics are inferior to those specified as minimum for the Standard grade.