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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

[Doc. No. AMS-LP-25-0485]

United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is seeking public comments concerning revisions to the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef. This request for comments stems from an American Wagyu Association petition, which requested that AMS consider adding marbling degrees to the USDA Prime grade for beef to better characterize modern genetics, which are not always differentiated within the current marbling degrees. AMS is also soliciting public comment on whether to eliminate the skeletal maturity requirement for carcasses determined by dentition to be under 30 months of age. Scientific research and data on beef tenderness suggest that the skeletal maturity requirement could be eliminated.

DATES: Submit comments on or before September 8, 2026.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit comments electronically at <https://www.regulations.gov> or to Chad Nelson, USDA Service Center, AMS, Livestock and Poultry Program, 451 East Deere Street, West Point, NE 68788. All comments should reference docket number AMS-LP-25-0485, the date of submission, and the page number of this issue of the **Federal Register**. All comments received will be posted without change, including any personal information provided.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For additional information, please contact Chad Nelson, National Meat Supervisor, Livestock and Poultry Program, phone (402) 281-8704; or email at chad.nelson2@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 203(c) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, as amended (7 U.S.C. 1621 *et seq.*), directs and authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture "to develop and improve standards of quality, condition, quantity, grade, and packaging, and recommend and demonstrate such standards in order to encourage uniformity and consistency in commercial practices." AMS is committed to carrying out this authority in a manner that facilitates the marketing of agricultural commodities. While the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef (carcass beef grade standards) do not appear in the Code of Federal Regulations, they, along with other official Standards, are maintained by USDA and can be found at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/grades-standards>. Physical copies of official United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef are also available upon request. To propose changes to the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef, AMS does so in accordance with 7 CFR part 36, initially promulgated on August 13, 1997, in the **Federal Register** (62 FR 43430).

Background

The carcass beef grade standards and the associated voluntary, fee-for-service beef grading service program are authorized under the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, as amended (7 U.S.C. 1621 *et seq.*). The primary purpose of Federal grade standards, including the carcass beef grade standards, is to divide the population of a commodity into uniform groups (of similar quality, yield, value, *etc.*) to facilitate marketing. In concert, the Federal voluntary, fee-for-service grading program is designed to provide an independent, objective determination whether a given product is in conformance with the applicable official Federal standard. In the case of beef, when it is voluntarily graded to the carcass beef grade standards under the beef grading service, the official grade consists of a quality grade and/or a yield grade.

The quality grades are intended to identify differences in the palatability or eating satisfaction of cooked beef, principally through the characteristics of intramuscular flecks of fat (known as marbling) and physiological maturity groupings. The principal official USDA quality grades for young (maturity groups A and B) cattle and carcasses are Prime, Choice, and Select, in descending order in terms of historic market value. USDA recognizes that the beef standards must remain relevant to be of greatest value to stakeholders and, therefore, recommendations for changes in the standards may be initiated by USDA or by interested parties at any time to achieve that goal.

For beef, USDA quality grades provide a simple, effective means of describing and differentiating product quality that is easily understood by both buyers and sellers. By identifying separate and distinct levels of quality, these grades enable buyers to obtain the kind of beef that meets their needs. For example, certain restaurants may choose to only sell officially-graded USDA Prime beef to provide their customers with a product that meets a very consistent and high level of palatability and eating satisfaction. At the same time, grades are important in transmitting information to cattle producers to help ensure informed marketing decisions are made. For example, the market preference and price paid for a particular grade of beef is communicated to cattle producers so they can adjust their production accordingly. In such cases, if the price premiums being paid for USDA Prime or Choice beef merits producers making the investments required in cattle genetics and feeding to produce more high-quality beef products, then such marketing decisions can be made with justification.

Marbling

The current carcass beef grade standards define the USDA Prime grade with four degrees of marbling: Slightly Abundant, Moderately Abundant, Abundant, and Very Abundant. The number of carcasses grading as USDA Prime has increased over the past several years, increasing from 6.2% in 2017 to 12.2% in 2025.¹ Also, carcasses

¹ Based upon aggregated grading data collected from beef grading facilities that employ AMS services.

grading as USDA Prime are exhibiting a wider range of marbling degrees than the four degrees of marbling.²

Advancements in beef production through genetics, feeding regimes, husbandry, and other practices have led to increases in carcass weights, marbling scores, and more high-quality beef for consumers. As a result, the American Wagyu Association has petitioned AMS to review the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass beef to explore the possibility of adding marbling degrees to the USDA Prime grade for beef.

Maturity Grouping Requirements

Carcass beef grade standards use dentition or age verification to determine maturity groupings, along with skeletal and lean (physiological) maturity. The maturity groupings were never intended to be a definitive method to determine the age of cattle at the time of slaughter; instead, the intention was to use them to predict beef palatability. Historically, the maturity groupings have been roughly correlated to different age categories. Maturity grouping A was correlated with beef from cattle between 9 and 30 months of age at time of slaughter, maturity grouping B was correlated with beef from cattle between 30 and 42 months of age at time of slaughter, maturity grouping C was correlated with beef from cattle between 42 and 72 months of age at time of slaughter, maturity grouping D was correlated with beef from cattle between 72 and 96 months of age at time of slaughter, and maturity grouping E was correlated with beef from cattle more than 96 months of age at time of slaughter. However, these are rough approximations that are influenced by other factors including diet, growth promotion administration, calving, breed, and a variety of environmental factors. Therefore, cattle that are younger than 30 months of age may have a physiological maturity of B or greater due to factors such as those listed above.

Due to food safety requirements, dentition is used on all slaughtered cattle to determine whether their age at the time of slaughter was less than or greater than 30 months of age. Cattle older than 30 months of age must have specific risk materials (*e.g.*, vertebral column) removed from their carcasses before the sale of the resulting beef cuts. Age verification involves providing proper paperwork or other proof of an animal's actual age (*i.e.*, less than 30 months of age). It is also used for other purposes, including to satisfy foreign

market requirements for U.S. beef from cattle under a specified age.

Data and scientific information indicate that carcasses from grain-fed steers and heifers that are deemed less than 30 months of age, based on dentition, are similar in palatability to maturity group A carcasses determined via physiological maturity.³ Thus, these carcasses could be classified as maturity group A for grading purposes even though the physiological maturity characteristics of maturity group B or an older maturity group may be present. Revising the carcass beef grade standards to allow dentition and age verification to have priority over physiological maturity would allow for an alternate method of classifying beef carcasses into maturity groupings. Subsequently, additional carcasses would qualify for the higher USDA grades of Prime, Choice, and Select without a significant reduction in the consistency of those grades in predicting palatability.

Additional Matters

AMS also understands that there are ongoing discussions within the beef industry regarding the effectiveness of the current yield grade calculations used to predict the yield of boneless retail cuts derived from beef carcasses. Though scientific studies have not yet reached a conclusion, AMS acknowledges that the results from those studies may lead to a future request to revise the grade standards. Therefore, respondents are not precluded from submitting comments on this subject.

Request for Comments

AMS is soliciting comments, including data, recommendations, and other information, from stakeholders about potential changes to the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef. Comments may include any current and/or ongoing research or industry practice that has relevance to the carcass beef grade standards. AMS also invites comments on how those changes should be implemented in the Federal voluntary, fee-for-service grading programs.

AMS will evaluate comments received and consider any next steps supported by stakeholders, including proposing revisions to the standards. If revisions are made, AMS will publish a draft of the updated United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef in the **Federal Register** for an additional comment period.

AMS invites comment on the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef and is specifically interested in responses to the following questions:

1. How could the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef be updated to better align with current and future advances in technology?
2. Are there any beef grades or marbling degrees that have become irrelevant or any new marbling degrees that should be added? If so, how many and what names should be used?
3. For the purposes of official USDA quality grading, would removing the supplemental physiological maturity requirements for under 30 months of age carcasses better suit the needs of stakeholders?
4. Is there information in general which should be added to or removed from the current United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef?
5. How could the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef be updated to reflect the current marketing of beef?
6. How could the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef be updated to be more useful for the spectrum of producers and processors?
7. How could the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef be updated to be more useful to volume food buyers and those engaged in institutional purchases?
8. How could the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef be updated to be more meaningful to end-consumers?
9. How could the United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef be updated to allow U.S. beef to be more competitively marketed in the international marketplace?
10. Are there any other recommendations, suggestions, or ideas that would be relevant for AMS to consider?

Melissa Bailey,

Associate Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service.

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BILLING CODE 3410-02-P

COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

Notice of Public Meeting of the Utah Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; Cancellation

AGENCY: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

ACTION: Notice; cancellation of meeting.

SUMMARY: The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a notice in the **Federal**

² *Ibid.*

³ Carcass sampling and lab analysis done by Colorado State University, Dr. Belk, *et al.*