



Marketing and Labeling Grass (Forage) Fed Beef Products

By: Christa L. Kirby¹ and Bridget Carlisle²

With the ever changing marketing of animals, consumers are seeing more and more “specialized” labeling claims on their products. Producers have found if they can set their products apart they will be able to sell that particular product for an increased price. One of the most recent meat labeling claims to become standardized is “Grass Fed” beef. With the increased number of beef products to carry a labeling claim of grass fed the USDA/AMS has established a set of standards for this particular product. By placing a standard on this product it helps the consumer to better know what it is exactly that they are purchasing.

USDA/AMS published as a notice to the public register on October 16, 2007 the “U.S. Standard for Livestock and Meat Marketing Claim, Grass (Forage) Fed Claim for Ruminant Livestock and the Meat Products Derived from such livestock.” (AMS) By publishing this standard any producer who uses a Grass or Forage Fed Label must meet the USDA standard for this particular label. The producer may go above and beyond those standards, but must meet those standards as a minimum. The standards state that any meat product carrying the USDA Certified Grass Fed Label must have been raised on forage or grass diet as the lifetime food source of the ruminant animal outside of milk the animal received prior to weaning. The animal’s diet is to be made up solely of forage products and cannot be fed grain or any grain by-products. The animal must also have continuous access to pasture during the growing season. Though the standard is voluntary, the producer must comply with the standards if they carry any type of grass fed label.

Many producers who use the “Grass Fed” label indicate that their product is also organic or natural. It is important for consumers to understand the “Grass Fed” label does not establish a method of which the animal is raised as long as the diet comes from forage. In fact, most beef produced would qualify as a natural product under the USDA standard.

One way producers may get around the label issue is to put an alternative label that does not have standards on their product. One of the most common labels used for grass fed animals is the “pasture raised” label. The label is stating the same style of animal rearing as the Grass Fed label but it is phrased differently. Ultimately the consumer is the one who gets lost in the labeling wars.

As the competition for the consumer at the meat case becomes more important you will begin to see more and more labels. At this time the only labels that are under USDA standards are the USDA Organic, USDA Naturally Raised, USDA Grass Fed and USDA Process Verified. Some other marketing claims that are currently being reviewed by

¹ Christa L. Kirby, Extension Agent II, Livestock. UF/IFAS Manatee County Extension Service

² Bridget Carlisle, Extension Agent II, Livestock. UF/IFAS Polk County Extension Service

USDA/AMS are sustainability, locally produced, and humanely raised and handled. Each day more and more claims are coming to the meat case. As a consumer the best action that can be taken is to better inform you of the different methods for raising animals.

Sources:

U.S.D.A. 2007. United States Standards for Livestock and Meat Marketing Claims, Grass (Forage) Fed Claim for Ruminant Livestock and the Meat Products Derived from Such Livestock. Agricultural Marketing Service. Washington D.C.

<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELDEV3102211> Accessed February 22, 2010.

Carr, Chad, Larry Eubanks and Ryan Dijkhuis. 2008. *Specialty Meat Marketing Claims: What's the Difference?* <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/AN191> Accessed February 22, 2010