



PRODUCT CONTROL

Purpose

This instruction defines Meat Grading and Certification (MGC) Branch policies, objectives, and general procedures for establishing and maintaining product identification and traceability during processing and certification operations. It includes basic guidelines for controlling products through all stages of receiving, processing, packaging, and storage, as well as minimum requirements for maintaining integrity of product samples.

Policy

It is the policy of the MGC Branch to assist in the development and monitoring of procedures designed to ensure positive identification and traceability of certified products, as well as raw materials and ingredients destined for use in certification programs. Meat graders and supervisors work with applicants to develop local product control programs which will accomplish the objectives and specific requirements outlined in this instruction. Control procedures for each operation are outlined in the local MGC Branch Quality Plan for the particular item.

Objectives

Local control procedures must accomplish the objectives described below.

Positive identification.

Procedures must provide for positive identification and traceability of individual certified items or batches of certified products from the time of initial certification through all stages of processing, packaging, packing, handling, storage, and shipping.

Inspection and test status.

All products must be readily identifiable as to their current status with regard to in-process inspection and testing from the time of initial acceptance through final certification.

Grade.

Grade identification may be maintained by one or any combination of the following methods:

1. Applying at least one yield grade shield and/or two quality grade shields with a roller brand to carcasses or fabricated cuts. This method is limited to in-house control programs.

2. Applying preliminary grademarks to carcasses or fabricated cuts. This method is limited to in-house control programs.
3. When a specification requires products that qualify for a specific grade, carcasses or cuts destined for further in-house processing may be identified with a "USDA Pre-ident" stamp.
4. If products are received from an establishment with an approved grade labeling program, products in grade labeled bags and boxes may be accepted for specified grade requirements. If grade labeled products are received from establishments which do not have an approved grade labeling program, report the incident to a Food Safety and Inspection Service inspector-in-charge and an MGC supervisor for further investigation.

Previously certified products.

Cuts previously certified and stamped with an official USDA stamp must be controlled from the time they are identified until they are sealed in appropriately marked containers. Products are controlled using the following statistical sampling procedure:

1. Select 20 containers from boxes of previously certified products presented for sealing. This may include one or a combination of items previously certified and stamped with the appropriate USDA stamp.
2. Examine each piece in each of the 20 sample containers to verify they are stamped.
3. Reject the production lot if any piece is not stamped.
4. Rejected lots may be reworked. Reexamine 100 percent of the product to ensure proper identification, as well as 100 percent of the products offered for the next 5 working days.

Formulation.

Formulation will be certified only under constant MGC Branch supervision.

In-line operations.

Graders, in cooperation with the local MGC Branch supervisor and plant management, will determine the appropriate level of direct supervision necessary to ensure the integrity of products certified in continuous process operations such as ground beef production.

Samples.

USDA product samples are maintained under the grader's direct visual control or in a locked or sealed container.

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