



August 9, 2006

Martin E. O'Conner
Chief, Standardization Branch, Livestock and Seed Program
USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Room 2607-S
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250-0254

Docket #LS-05-09

Dr. Mr. O'Conner,

Wild Oats Markets is a leading national chain of natural and organic retail stores with 113 stores in 24 U.S. states and British Columbia, Canada. We provide products that help our customers lead a healthy lifestyle, and support products and livestock being raised in harmony with nature.

Please accept this letter as our comment on the proposed voluntary claim and standards for grass fed (forage) marketing, docket #LS-05-09. While we at Wild Oats strongly support the proposal, we believe it can be further strengthened to ensure consumers of grass fed products are not being misled by the proposed claim and standards.

First, we believe it is absolutely necessary to require that any meat labeled under this program be sourced from animals that receive 99 percent of their lifetime energy supply from grass and forage. The 1 percent allows for some supplementation and inadvertent feeding of grains, which we believe is necessary and acceptable only as an emergency feed source. We also support that this 1 percent exception should only include immature grains, such as wheat in stalk or immature corn.

Second, we feel strongly that non-confinement is an essential part of the grass fed definition. The issue of confinement must be included in the grass fed standard. Cattle that have received a 99 percent forage diet fed in confinement cannot be considered grass fed. Yet, unless the USDA strengthens this definition, feedlot conditions would be allowed under the current proposal. If confinement was allowed during the life of the animal, the term grass fed would be incredibly misleading to consumers, as "grass fed" is synonymous with animals having free access to pasture and/or range. To strengthen this standard, we propose that the grass fed standard include a requirement stating that

ruminant animals defined as grass fed cannot be fed in confinement more than 30 days per calendar year. We believe this standard allows for emergency situations and that confinement should only be allowed in emergency situations when the health and well-being of the animals are at risk, such as extreme weather or a catastrophic event. The rest of the year, producers using the grass fed label must have their animals grazing free range on open pasture.

Third, we believe that grass fed standards should be a process verified program by the USDA. Similar to the National Organic Standards, an exception should be made for smaller producers from formal certification of grass fed products. This will remove the cost barrier, allowing smaller producers to enter the grass fed market and increase the availability of grass fed products in the U.S., thereby offering consumers a greater level of choice.

We trust that the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service will seriously consider these recommendations. The grass fed suppliers we work with at Wild Oats Markets and the grass fed industry as a whole are in strong support of further strengthening and amending the definition and standards of grass fed production. We commend the USDA for publishing the proposed voluntary claim and standards for grass fed marketing, and encourage you to adopt the proposals in this letter to protect the integrity of the grass fed label, as well as the trust of U.S. consumers who choose grass fed products.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kurt Luttecke', is written over a horizontal line.

Kurt Luttecke
Vice President of Perishables
Wild Oats Markets, Inc.