



Sealing, Stamping, and Control of Containers

Purpose

The purpose of this Instruction is to ensure that product certified by the Meat Grading and Certification (MGC) Branch maintains its integrity and is identifiable through all stages of production, storage, and shipment. This Instruction outlines procedures for sealing, stamping, and correcting container markings of certified products; as well as, the guidelines for managing rejected product.

Applicant Responsibilities

Applicants shall provide all materials for strapping (closing), sealing, stamping, and correcting containers including but not limited to: nonmetallic strapping, filament tape (capable of remaining intact in freezing conditions), fast-drying ink, stamp pads, and correcting spray or paint. Applicants are responsible for obliterating Official USDA box markings and stamps from rejected product within 30 days of the rejection notification.

Unless otherwise specified in contractual documents, containers shall be marked, strapped (closed) and sealed in accordance with the Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications (IMPS) General Requirements.

Procedures

The shipping containers of certified products must be sealed. The following methods may be used to seal containers. Please refer to MGC Instruction 619 for proper use of appropriate stamps.

1. Tape

Light colored nylon filament or clear cellophane tape may be used to seal boxes, combo bins, meat tanks, etc. as long as fast-drying ink is used to apply the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Shield Stamp over the tape.

One or more continuous bands of nylon filament tape shall be placed around the box in a manner which precludes tampering. The box shall be sealed by overlapping at least four inches of tape on the face of the box (the end panel that contains product identifying marks). In cases where the box depth is less than four inches, the entire end panel shall be overlapped with tape. A tape machine may be used to apply clear tape to the top and bottom of the box provided the ends of the tape touch or partially overlap on the box ends. Place a legible imprint of the appropriate stamp over the overlapped tape on the face of the box.

2. Nonmetallic straps

Light colored, nonmetallic, heat-sealed strapping material may be used to strap (close) and seal shipping containers. Place a legible imprint of the applicable USDA stamp over the strap on the end panel using fast-drying ink.

3. Alternative Sealing Methods

Vendors are encouraged to develop alternative labels and printing mechanisms that incorporate the “USDA Shield” or “USDA Accepted as Specified” Stamp, as appropriate, onto the product label, strapping or sealing tape. Vendors wishing to use alternative sealing methods shall devise a control program to monitor label, strapping and tape inventories in relation to use on USDA certified products. Vendors shall only be allowed to use alternative sealing methods after their control program is submitted to and approved by the MGC Branch.

4. Colored Plastic Seals

- a. Single-use colored plastic seals may be used to maintain control of product in movable containers such as combo bins, racks, or tubs. Seal integrity shall be ensured by putting a seal through a tag or other identifying device that includes the seal number, product identity, date and time of acceptance, any other pertinent information, an imprint of the USDA Shield Stamp.
- b. Colored plastic seals may also be used to seal sample containers, office drawers, freezers, etc. In this case, a Seal Control Form (**Exhibit A**) shall be completed and placed in the unit to be sealed.
- c. To reduce the likeliness of someone reusing a seal, draw the tail tight and then remove it. This makes it nearly impossible to remove and replace the seal.
- d. Periodically, the MGC Branch issues a new color of plastic seals. The previously issued seals shall be destroyed.

5. Canned products

Hermetically-sealed, canned items which bear an embossed can code are considered sealed. The can code must be specific to only one production lot. The following procedures apply:

- a. Obtain can codes to be used on certified products prior to beginning certified production.

- b. Notify Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Inspector-in-charge of the can codes used on certified product, and request that they ensure, during their normal surveillance, that these codes are not duplicated on uncertified products.
- c. Ensure that all cans examined for condition of container defects and product defects are properly coded.
- d. All cans of product within each production lot bear markings to distinguish them from cans of product in other lots.
- e. Shipping containers of canned items are not required to be sealed unless otherwise specified by the purchaser.

6. Ink

Fast-drying ink shall be used for sealing containers. Graders shall ensure that the ink used is capable of remaining on the sealing material and the shipping container.

7. Correcting mislabeled containers

Mislabeled containers may be corrected provided they do not require extensive changes. If containers require extensive corrections the entire lid or container, as applicable, shall be replaced.

a. Paint:

Incorrect markings may be obliterated by painting over them with paint similar in color to that of the container. The correct markings shall be applied in the same location as the original markings and then a USDA Stamp shall be applied over the edge of the change, so long as the new markings are legible.

b. Pressure sensitive labels:

Mislabeled containers may be corrected using pressure sensitive labels. These labels must meet all IMPS General Requirements, be capable of remaining attached through refrigeration, and accept and hold USDA stamp imprints.

c. Paper labels (canned product):

Mislabeled canned product may be corrected by placing new labels that fully cover the cans circumference and/or the original labels.

d. No other correction methods are acceptable.

8. Rejected Products

a. Notification/Segregation:

Supervisory Meat Graders or a designee shall notify the applicant and the local FSIS Inspector when confirmed positive E. coli O157:H7 results are received on

USDA product. They must also provide the applicant and inspector with the production date(s), lot number(s), and box counts of the involved lots. The applicant and the meat grader shall work together to identify and segregate the involved product from acceptable product.

b. Identification:

AMS Agents shall use orange USDA Product Control Tags to identify all meat products rejected for use in USDA certified programs. For products which have been frozen and subsequently rejected for temperature or non-complying laboratory analyses, AMS Agents will complete and apply USDA Product Control Tags at the freezer facility. One USDA Product Control Tag shall be applied to each side of every pallet in a conspicuous manner. The number of each completed USDA Product Control Tag and the disposition of the corresponding product shall be recorded in the USDA Product Control Tag Log Sheet. **(Exhibit B)**

c. Certificate of Rejection:

AMS Agents shall issue an Agricultural Products Rejection Certificate (LS-5-3) indicating the reason for rejection in the remarks section of the certificate.

d. Removal of USDA Product Control Tags/Time Limitation:

USDA Product Control Tags shall remain on the rejected product until it is properly disposed, utilized commercially, a purchaser waiver is received, or the official USDA markings are removed from the containers, as appropriate. Applicants are responsible for obliterating Official USDA box markings and stamps within 30 days of rejection notification. **USDA Product Control Tags shall be removed only by AMS Agents and only following verification that the official USDA box markings and stamps have been obliterated.**

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Exhibit A	Exhibit B	Exhibit C

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Seal Control Form

Date Sealed: _____ Grader's Name: _____ Seal Number: _____	Date Seal Removed: _____ Grader's Name: _____
Date Sealed: _____ Grader's Name: _____ Seal Number: _____	Date Seal Removed: _____ Grader's Name: _____
Date Sealed: _____ Grader's Name: _____ Seal Number: _____	Date Seal Removed: _____ Grader's Name: _____
Date Sealed: _____ Grader's Name: _____ Seal Number: _____	Date Seal Removed: _____ Grader's Name: _____
Date Sealed: _____ Grader's Name: _____ Seal Number: _____	Date Seal Removed: _____ Grader's Name: _____
Date Sealed: _____ Grader's Name: _____ Seal Number: _____	Date Seal Removed: _____ Grader's Name: _____
Date Sealed: _____ Grader's Name: _____ Seal Number: _____	Date Seal Removed: _____ Grader's Name: _____

Complete the form in blue ink and place your USDA Shield Stamp over each entry.

USDA Product Control Tag Log Sheet

Tag Number	Date Issued	Reason for Tagging	Disposition of Product	Action Taken	Date Removed	Removed by (EQC)

FORM LS-10
(4-85)

NO. 01064

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE
LIVESTOCK AND SEED DIVISION



DO NOT REMOVE TAG
OR
USE PRODUCT
WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION

(SEE REVERSE)

NO. 01064

PRODUCT TAGGED

NO. OF CONTAINERS

The product(s) or container(s) to which this tag is attached is (are) controlled under authority of the Agricultural Marketing Act and is (are) not to be used, moved or altered in any manner without the expressed permission of an authorized representative of the United States Department of Agriculture. The unauthorized removal or alteration of this tag or utilization of the tagged product(s) is a violation of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, as amended and regulations issued thereunder

REMARKS

AUTHORIZED EMPLOYEE

DATE

PRODUCT CONTROL

LOCATION AND REMARKS

AUTHORIZED EMPLOYEE

DATE

FORM LS-10

Reverse