Operational Requirements Comment Period (7/24/12 – 8/31/12) Summary

- It is not the jurisdiction of USDA to set forth specific standards that have the possibility to change as science and technology advances. We agree a better approach is to rely upon the expertise of the scientific community and the beef industry as we are also involved in bringing new technologies forward to better meet consumer demand for tender beef products.

- Tenderness Assessment Methodology – the statement "…and validated technology capable of *either* assessing slice shear force." Is the word choice of "*either"* accurate in this statement? If so, is there another validated technology assessment the Agency is referring to regarding the methodology that should be included in this statement?

- A meat lab proficiency program for tenderness measurement is very much needed and implied that variability in test results among labs is what's making it difficult to develop consensus tenderness thresholds. Information on the process for a lab or entity to become an AMS-third party approved entity would also be beneficial.

  With regard to the validation process outlined in the document, would the Agency please provide clarification or reasoning to the statement of "Assessed slice shear force must be validated every *six months* through an *AMS-approved third party*?" Additional clarification of who is an "*AMS-approved third party*" entity would be appreciated. AMS should publish a current list of AMS-approved third parties.

- Are you referring to a lab being validated by a third party every six months or the tenderness claim being validated every six months by a third party. If it is the former I would recommend a yearly validation through MARC. If it is the later, is six month samples really sufficient? I would recommend a more continuous testing methodology.

- In terms of the "USDA-approved and validated technologies," AMS must establish a clear and concise definition of this term. Further, a list of USDA-approved and validated technologies should be developed by AMS and shared with the industry. Finally, AMS should provide references on how to obtain USDA approval for technologies.

- The solicitation for comments should have been published in the *Federal Register,* so all stakeholders would be informed and have the opportunity to comment.

- We also ask AMS to provide additional information in a public and transparent manner on the process and requirements for the voluntary label claims.

- Could it be questioned that the decision to use SSF and not WBSF was based on research from only one laboratory? I think that WBSF more closely evaluates the 'total' tenderness of longissimus steaks because it measures a greater proportion of steaks, whereas SSF only measures the lateral proportion of LL steaks, which routinely is the least tender portion of the LL muscle. Based upon the abundance of literature that would support both SSF and WBSF as acceptable objective measures of beef tenderness and as predictors of consumer satisfaction, and that ASTM F2925-11 references a standard for both SSF and WBSF, I do not see any logical reason why both methods of tenderness evaluation should not be included in the standard. I would strongly suggest that USDA-AMS consider adding WBSF as an explicitly acceptable method for process validation prior to publishing the standard.

- A specific reference to the FSIS, OPPD, LPDD web page may be helpful. In addition, you should cite the meat regulations (i.e., Title 9 CFR 300-350), the FSIS Food Standards and Labeling Policy Book, the Guide to Federal Food Labeling Requirements for Meat and Poultry Products?

- Does some mention in the document need to be made about how decisions will be made concerning the effectiveness of “documented quality management programs”. There is mention of approval determination on a case-by-case basis, desk audit, etc. Some have taken this to imply “trust us, we will only approve the programs that will work” without more specifics.

- What role does the ASTM standard practices document play in all of this. You mentioned it is being developed in your cover letter, but there is no indication of how it will be applied in the requirements document. Is it simply going to be a “suggested” standard practices document? Or, once it is developed, will it be THE standard that must be followed or you cannot play in the tenderness marketing claims arena?

- All I have talked to on this subject are under the impression that this standard is strictly for marketing claims for specific muscles based on some sort of certification of carcasses only. Is that the intent? Is it also to be able to be used for purveyors who deal with subprimals?