United States Department of Agriculture
Marketing and Regulatory Programs
Agricultural Marketing Service
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MGC Instruction 609
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Meat Grading & Certification Branch

ORGANOLEPTIC EXAMINATION FOR MEAT

Purpose

This Instruction defines policies and procedures for examining products for excellent condition organoleptically.

Policy

All products certified by the Meat Grading and Certification (MGC) Branch shall be examined for excellent condition requirements at the time of initial certification, and as necessary at each subsequent stage of processing. It is the responsibility of the contractor to ensure products are received, presented, and maintained in excellent condition through all stages of production. Products found to be in less than excellent condition at any time shall be rejected and ineligible for reentry into certified product programs. Products may not be trimmed or otherwise reconditioned in any fashion to meet excellent condition requirements.

Excellent Condition Requirements

The exposed lean and fat surfaces of fresh chilled meat (not previously frozen) in excellent condition are of a color and bloom normally associated with the class, grade, and cut of meat and typical of meat that has been properly stored and handled. Cut surfaces and naturally exposed lean surfaces shall show nor more than slight darkening or discoloration due to dehydration, aging, and/or microbial activity. The fat shall show not more than very slight discoloration due to oxidation or microbial activity. No odors foreign to fresh meat shall be present. Change in color and odors characteristically associated with vacuum packaged meat in excellent condition shall be acceptable.

Also, product shall show no evidence of freezing, defrosting, or mishandling. Meat that has been properly palletized and stored shall not exhibit excessive purge. Changes in color, odors, and textures characteristically associated with meats in excellent condition that have been processed using recognized pathogen intervention or vacuum-packaging methods are acceptable. Beef must be maintained in excellent condition through processing, storage, and transit.

Condition Scores

Condition is sometimes described by assigning condition scores to cuts of meats. These scores are helpful in developing consistency among grading personnel as well as members of industry. Please keep in mind that these scores are subjective since they

are determined organoleptically. A plus (+) or minus (-) may be used to more accurately describe the appropriate score.

1 = *Excellent Condition – Freshly Slaughtered Beef*

Meat that is typical of freshly slaughtered beef. Lean is warm and pliable and there is **no evidence** of dehydration or discoloration of lean or fat surfaces.

2 = *Excellent Condition*

Meat that is typical of carcasses that have been held in a cooler for 2-3 days. Cut surfaces and naturally, exposed lean surfaces **show no** darkening or discoloration due to dehydration, aging, and/or microbial activity. The fat shows no discoloration due to oxidation or microbial activity.

3 = Minimum Excellent Condition Requirements

Cut surfaces and naturally, exposed lean surfaces **show a slight** darkening or discoloration due to dehydration, aging, and/or microbial activity. The fat **shows a very slight discoloration** due to oxidation or microbial activity.

4 = *Less than Excellent Condition*

Cut surfaces and naturally, exposed lean surfaces **show more than a slight** darkening or discoloration due to dehydration, aging, and/or microbial activity. The fat **shows more than a slight** discoloration due to oxidation or microbial activity. Packaged meat exhibits excessive purge. Any off odor automatically categorizes the meat into a Condition Score of at least 4.

5 = *Less than Excellent Condition – Condemned Product*

Meat that has advanced microbial activity is considered to be in less than excellent condition. This is apparent through **off odor**, at least a **small amount** of discoloration, tackiness, and/or slickness of lean and fat surfaces. Meat found in this category shall be retained and a Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) Inspector notified.

Examination Procedures

Boneless meat may be examined on a 100 percent or stationary lot examination basis. Examinations shall be performed in accordance with the IMPS Quality Assurance Provisions, Product Examination, and other applicable specifications.

Correlation Procedures

The Organoleptic Examination Correlation Worksheet (Exhibit A) shall be used to conduct Correlations. Ten items or pieces of meat shall be identified for each correlation. As necessary, indicate if the cut is slightly better or worse than the score definition by placing a (+) or (-) in the appropriate column.

Exhibit A
Organoleptic Examination Correlation Worksheet

Grader's Name _____   Plant Name _____

Official's Name _____   Date _____

		Class	Bone-In	Boneless	Product Type	+/-	Accept	Reject	Comments
1	Grader								
	Official								
2	Grader								
	Official								
3	Grader								
	Official								
4	Grader								
	Official								
5	Grader								
	Official								
6	Grader								
	Official								
7	Grader								
	Official								
8	Grader								
	Official								
9	Grader								
	Official								
10	Grader								
	Official								

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