



ATTRA *news*

Newsletter of the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: A project of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT)

Pasture-Based Beef and Dairy Production

Many small- and mid-size livestock ranchers are looking for ways to differentiate their products in the marketplace. Consumer demand for grass-fed beef and dairy products is growing as people learn about the health benefits. Pasture-based production has many advantages for ranchers, for livestock, for communities and for ecosystems. In this issue, we compare the production standards of three commonly used grass-fed livestock labels.



Photo courtesy USDA NRCS.

What Do the Various Grass Fed Labels Stand for? Jeff Schahczenski, NCAT Program Specialist

Label claims can create confusion for consumers and producers in niche beef markets. Producers are unsure about which new market will best serve their interests. Consumers find it difficult to understand how best to exercise their consumer vote. Compounding the confusion, the USDA offers several different label claims for meat.

Private entities are free to create any label claim they wish and can ask the USDA for authorization of a label claim. However, such label claims require ample documentation of the truth of the claim before it is granted. The use of such a claim opens the user to possible litigation if a competitor wishes to dispute the truthfulness of the claim.

Through a USDA program called the *Process Verified Program*, private companies can also have their claims authenticated by an unbiased third party. This USDA-sanctioned label is not

often used by alternative marketers of livestock because of the expense and the complex paperwork required for application. To learn more, see www.processverified.usda.gov

Trade associations may create trademarks or label claims that members of their association can attach to their product. A good example of this approach to product differentiation is a label created by the American Grassfed Association (AGA). Learn more about the label at www.americangrassfed.com. This association trademark is only for AGA members. It is a third-party verified trademark and the verification is done by the Food Alliance, www.foodalliance.org. Again, this label claim has to be approved by the USDA. Although this is a trade association trademark, any private entity could create a similar individual trademark. To learn more about these programs and related ATTRA studies, contact Jeff Schahczenski, jeffs@ncat.org, (406) 494-8636.

See pages 2 and 3 for a comparison of the livestock standards for the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Grass Fed label, the American Grassfed Association's American Grassfed label and the USDA National Organic Program.

ATTRA Publications about Beef and Dairy Production and Grass Farming

Beef and Dairy Production

- Beef Farm Sustainable Checksheet IP129
- Beef Marketing Alternatives IP290
- Building a Montana Organic Livestock Industry IP346
- NEW: Cattle Production: Considerations for Pasture-Based Beef and Dairy Producers IP305
- Dairy Beef CT109
- Dairy Farm Sustainability Checksheet IP174
- NEW: Dairy Production on Pasture: An Introduction to Grass-Based and Seasonal Dairying IP340
- Dairy Resource List: Organic and Pasture-Based IP307
- Economics of Grass-based Dairying IP210
- Integrated Parasite Management for Livestock IP150

- Natural Livestock Feasibility Study IP 347
- NCAT's Organic Livestock Workbook IP228
- Organic Livestock Documentation Forms IP237
- Predator Control for Sustainable & Organic Livestock Production IP196
- Raising Dairy Heifers on Pasture CT110
- Value-added Dairy Option CT151

Grass Farming

- Assessing the Pasture Soil Resource IP128
- Brief Overview of Nutrient Cycling in Pastures IP221
- Converting Cropland to Perennial Grassland IP244
- Dung Beetle Benefits in the Pasture Ecosystem CT155
- Grazing Networks for Livestock Producers CT166

- Grazing Contracts for Livestock IP247
- Managed Grazing in Riparian Areas IP223
- Multispecies Grazing CT147
- Nutrición para Rumiantes en Pastoreo SP318
- Nutrient Cycling in Pastures IP136
- Organic System Plans: Field & Row Crops and Pasture & Range Systems IP344
- NEW: Pasture, Rangeland, and Grazing Management IP306
- Pastures: Going Organic IP297
- Pastures: Sustainable Management IP284
- Rotational Grazing IP086
- Ruminant Nutrition for Graziers IP318

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www.attra.ncat.org

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Comparing Standards for Meat Production

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Grass Fed, American Grassfed Association, USDA National Organic Program Summarized by NCAT program specialist Ann Baier



	USDA AMS Grass Fed —2007	American Grassfed Association Grassfed Ruminant —2009	USDA National Organic Program (NOP) —2002
Verification or certification required ?	Certification is not required to use a grass fed claim. The standard is voluntary.	Certification to American Grassfed Association (AGA) standards is required in order to represent product using the American Grassfed Association logo and marks.	Certification by a USDA-accredited certifier is required of all operations using the organic claim on label. Certification involves an application, Organic System Plan, recordkeeping and initial/annual inspections to verify compliance with National Organic Standards.
Feed, grazing, pasture requirement	Animals “must have continuous access to pasture during the growing season” (between the average dates of the last spring frost and the first fall frost in the local area).	“Grass and forage shall be the feed source consumed for the lifetime of the ruminant animal, with the exception of milk consumed prior to weaning.” Livestock must be on range, pasture or paddocks for their entire lives.	Livestock must maintain living conditions to accommodate the health and natural behavior of animals, including access to the outdoors, shade, shelter, exercise areas, fresh air and direct sunlight suitable to the species, its stage of production, the climate, and the environment; and pasture for ruminants.
Confinement	Not addressed.	Livestock must not be confined to a feedlot or other area where forages or crops are not grown during the growing season. They may be fed hay, haylage, silage, crop residue without grain, and other roughage sources while on pasture in bad weather or when forage is poor. Animals cannot be fed stockpiled forage in confinement for more than 30 days per year.	Producers may provide temporary confinement for an animal because of inclement weather; the animal’s stage of production; conditions under which the health, safety, or well-being of the animal could be jeopardized; and risk to soil or water quality. Shelter must provide for comfort behaviors, exercise, and reduction of potential for injury.
Feed, definition of forage	Forage is any edible herbaceous plant material that can be grazed or harvested for feeding, except grain.	“The diet shall be derived solely from forage consisting of grass (annual and perennial), forbs (e.g. legumes, brassica), browse, or cereal grain crops in the vegetative (pre-grain) state. ”	Forage is vegetative material in a fresh, dried, or ensiled state (pasture, hay, or silage) which is fed to livestock.
Acceptable supplemental feed	Hay, haylage, baleage, silage, crop residue without grain, and other roughage. Crops normally harvested for grain must be foraged or harvested in the pre-grain state.	Any feed high (over 20%) in crude fiber and low (under 60%) in total digestible nutrients, on an air-dry basis. Must be from AGA list of approved feed materials.	Total feed ration composed of agricultural products, including pasture and forage, that are certified to be organically produced.
Prohibited feed, additives, supplements; feed production practices	Grain or grain by-products, cottonseed and cottonseed meal, soybean and soybean meal, non-protein nitrogen sources such as urea and animal by-products.	Animals cannot be fed grain or grain by-products (starch and protein sources), or any animal by-products.	Non organic feed; animal drugs including growth hormones; feed supplements, additives more than needed for adequate health; plastic pellets for roughage; feed formulas containing urea or manure; mammalian or poultry slaughter by-products; feed, feed additives, and feed supplements violating the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.
Production practices for forage & feed (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides)	Not addressed.	Not directly addressed.	Crop production including pasture management must comply with USDA NOP standards for crop production. Prohibited are most synthetic fertilizers, herbicides or pesticides, and all use of genetically modified organisms, sewage sludge, or ionizing radiation.
Milk, milk replacers	Milk or milk replacer is allowed.	Milk is allowed before weaning, but the source is not directly addressed.	Organic mother’s milk or organic milk replacer is allowed.



	USDA AMS Grass Fed—2007	American Grassfed Association Grassfed Ruminant —2009	USDA National Organic Program (NOP) —2002
Nutritional supplements	Routine mineral and vitamin supplementation may be included in the feeding regimen.	Approved mineral and vitamin supplements may be provided free choice to adjust the animal's nutrient intake. Supplements must be approved in advance by AGA.	Approved: vitamins, minerals, protein, amino acids, fatty acids, energy sources, and fiber (ruminants). Feed supplements or additives must not exceed amounts needed for adequate health at animal's specific stage of life.
Parasiticide use	Not addressed.	Not addressed.	Parasiticides are not allowed in slaughter stock. Non-routine use is allowed in breeder stock during the last third of gestation and in dairy stock more than 90 days prior to the production of organic milk.
Health care, living conditions and humane treatment	Not addressed.	Living conditions must support humane animal welfare, handling, transport, and slaughter. Sick or injured animals must be treated to relieve their symptoms.	Preventive health care practices are required, including: suitable species for the site and conditions; sufficient feed ration; appropriate housing, pasture conditions, sanitation to minimize diseases and parasites; conditions that allow exercise, freedom of movement, reduction of stress; vaccines; medical treatment for sick animals despite loss of organic status.
Records of animal origin, identity and traceback	Not directly addressed.	All records are to be maintained for a minimum of two years after the animal is sold or harvested. Records must show how and when supplements are provided, with receipts and ingredient lists. Records must show the source of all purchased market animals brought onto the farm or ranch and that they were raised according to AGA Grassfed Ruminant Standards. Only market animals 1 year of age or younger may be brought into the program by affidavit. Animals must be traceable by written record throughout their entire lives to their farm of origin. Producers must maintain an animal identification system to identify each animal and allow 48-hour trace-back.	Producers must maintain records concerning the production (land management and feed production or sourcing, health care, all materials used), harvesting, and handling of agricultural products. Records must be: complete enough to fully disclose all activities and transactions in sufficient detail as to be readily understood and audited; maintained for not less than 5 years beyond their creation; available for inspection. Livestock products must be from livestock under continuous organic management from the last third of gestation. Origin and identity of livestock must be traceable from gestation through slaughter and sale. Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and shall not be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced.
Hormones or steroids	Not addressed.	Prohibited. No hormones of any type may be administered.	Prohibited. See other prohibited substances above.
Antibiotics	Not addressed.	Prohibited. Animals must not be fed or injected antibiotics.	Prohibited. Animals treated for humane reasons may not be sold as organic.

These standards were summarized for comparison purposes only. For accurate details, see the following:

USDA AMS Grass Fed Standards

- U.S. Standard for Livestock and Meat Marketing Claim, Grass (Forage) Fed Claim for Ruminant Livestock and the Meat Products Derived from Such Livestock, www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5063842

American Grassfed Association Standards

- www.americangrassfed.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/aga_grassfed_standards_1_091.pdf

USDA National Organic Program (NOP) Standards

- www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop – Go to Electronic Code of Federal Regulations. 7 CFR Part 205 includes complete standards for crop and livestock production, handling, certification and inspection.
- Also see ATTRA's Organic Standards for Livestock Production: Highlights of the USDA's National Organic Program Regulations www.attra.org/attra-pub/PDF/nopstandard_livestock.pdf
- The NOP is engaged in rulemaking to provide greater detail for selected provisions of the NOP livestock regulations, especially as they relate to pasture and ruminant animals. Although it is not yet part of the rule, several organic dairy and trade associations have expressed their support for the National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) Livestock Committee Recommendation for Guidance on Pasture Requirements for the NOP which was adopted by the NOSB on Aug. 16, 2005.



Return Service Requested

Pasture, Forage, and Rangeland Resources

Behavioral Education for Human, Animal, and Ecosystem Management. www.behave.net

Grazing Management: An Ecological Perspective. <http://cnrit.tamu.edu/rlem/textbook/textbook-fr.html>

Grazing Systems Planning Guide. University of Minnesota Extension, www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/livestocksystems/DI7606.html

Intermountain Planting Guide. USDA Agricultural Research Service, Utah State University, www.extension.usu.edu/ah/html/publications/publication=8056

Livestock Behavior, Design of Facilities and Humane Slaughter by Temple Grandin, Ph.D. www.grandin.com

Pastures for Profit: A Guide to Rotational Grazing. University of Wisconsin Extension, <http://learningstore.uwex.edu>

Rangelands West, Western Rangelands Partnership. www.rangelandswest.org

Stockman Grass Farmer magazine. tel. 800-748-9808, www.stockmangrassfarmer.net

Beef Cattle Resources

Cow-Calf Management Guide and Cattle Producer's Library (CD and print). University of Idaho, tel. 208-885-6345, www.avs.uidaho.edu/wbrc

Iowa Beef Center. Iowa State University, www.iowabeefcenter.org

Montana State University Beef Cattle Extension Program. www.animalrange.extension.montana.edu/beef/beef.htm

Oklahoma State University Beef Cattle Publications. <http://pods.dasn.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-242>

Texas A&M University Beef Cattle Publications. <http://animalscience.tamu.edu/academics/beef/publications/index.htm>

Dairy Cattle Resources

Center for Dairy Profitability. University of Wisconsin, <http://cdp.wisc.edu/Great%20Lakes.htm>

Dairy Your Way: A Guide to Management Alternatives for the Upper Midwest.

Minn. Dept. of Ag., tel. 651-201-6012, www.misa.umn.edu/Dairy_Your_Way.html

Northeast Organic Dairy Producers Alliance. www.organicmilk.org/index.html

Organic Dairy Farming: A Resource for Farmers by Jody Padgham. www.mosesorganic.org, click on Bookstore

Prescribed Grazing and Feeding Management for Lactating Dairy Cows. New York State Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, tel. 607-756-0851

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ATTRAnews

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New and Updated Publications from ATTRA

- Biodiesel: Do-It-Yourself Production Basics
- Dairy Production on Pasture: An Introduction to Grass-Based and Seasonal Dairying
- Energy-Efficient Grain Drying Resources (online only, not paper)
- Market Gardening: A Start-Up Guide
- Potatoes: Organic Production and Marketing
- Organic System Plans: Field & Row Crops and Pasture & Range Systems

New in both English and Spanish:

- Finding Land to Farm: Six Ways to Secure Farmland
- Encontrando Tierra para Trabajar: Seis Maneras de Asegurar Tu Terreno Agrícola
- Start a Farm in the City: Change Your Community by Growing What You Eat
- Comience una Granja en la Ciudad: Haga un Cambio en Su Comunidad al Cultivar Sus Alimentos