



Inboden's Meats Ltd.
1106 N. First Street
Dekalb, IL 60115
(815) 756-5852
Fax: (815) 756-6677
Facts About Freezer Beef
© Inboden's Meats Ltd.

MEAT QUALITY FACTORS FOR BEEF

There are eight different United States Department of Agriculture USDA grades of quality of beef. (Prime, Choice, Select, Standard, Commercial, Utility, Cutter, Canner) Many consumers don't understand what makes meat grade high or low on the quality scale. The most important thing for the consumer to understand is that grading is done to provide a scale for consistency of the end product for the consumer. Beef grading is not to be confused with meat inspection. As it is mandatory that all meat be inspected under USDA guidelines for wholesomeness, grading should not be confused with wholesomeness or nutritional value, but for quality satisfaction. It is mandatory that all beef when harvested is inspected for wholesomeness, unless you're consuming your own personal product for your family, then it does not have to be inspected. But if you're selling that product or if you're harvesting that beef animal for sale to the public, it is mandated under government law that the animal be inspected for wholesomeness. Grading is a service that the USDA provides for a fee at the packing plant. What a government grader does is they place a quality designation upon the product that helps the retailer or restaurant in their purchasing decisions. Of all the cattle that are harvested, approximately seventy-percent or less go past a government grader. There are two factors that help beef fall into the upper grades, that being the maturity of the product and the degree of marbling within the ribeye muscle. Marbling is the flecks of fat within the meat that enhance tenderness and juiciness. A beef animal may have all the marbling of Prime, but if it too mature (old), it could never be placed in the upper grades as the muscles become coarse and not finely finished, but having a tendency to be tougher. USDA Prime has the most marbling which is what you consume in fancy restaurants, elegant hotels, and high end meat markets. Two percent or less of the graded cattle falls into this upper level grade, Prime. The next quality grade is USDA Choice, which is a very broad grade and anywhere from twenty-two percent to thirty-nine percent of the cattle harvested will fall into this grading category. Within this grade, there is not so choice Choice (low choice), middle of the road Choice, and really choice Choice (high Choice).

Most of the upper end Choice graded meat are hand selected by the meat packers and placed into premium programs that command more money per pound. Sometimes an argument between the packer and the grader was that the beef carcass should have been graded up into Prime. The next quality grade is USDA Select, twenty-five percent to forty percent of the cattle fall into this grade, which is used by many chain operations in their meat departments and many times has a fanciful tagline attached. For instance, "USDA Inspected Three Star Diamond Cut Quality Beef" – well, heck, all beef that is consumed by the public is USDA inspected. There is no federal grade of Three Star Diamond Cut Quality Beef, when actually it's the third highest quality grade which is USDA Select, but not advertised that way. The fourth highest quality is USDA Standard grade, which has very low marbling and is used by economy retail marketers. Sometimes it is enhanced with flavoring and tenderizing agents to make it more palatable and sold in the food service industry but on it's own is plain and can be less tender and flavorful. This fourth grade is never branded with an USDA grade, but is referred to in the industry as non-graded or non-branded beef, but is still inspected for wholesomeness. The bottom four grades are used for various commercial operations and are not

sold at retail to the consumer, but are used in cooking processes and sausage making processes or ground meat processes and would never waste the grader's time, but end up back on the grocery store in processed forms.

Here at Inbodens, we only buy the top ten percent of all graded beef. That's the two percent Prime and the very top eight-percent of the Choice grade. If more information regarding USDA grading is needed, you can go to our website at www.meatplace.com and there is a link in the lower left hand corner of the home page called "Beef Grades". Also, one other thing to note is that high quality beef is in general breed specific, Angus, Short Horn, Herford Cattle, along with other breeds that are native to the British Isles but have been imported to this country around the turn of the late 1800's and early 1900's. All cattle breeds have specific characteristics, some are good milkers, some are good musclers, some have great herd instincts. The British breeds have an inherent tendency to marble, which creates flavor and juiciness in the beef product. Also, controlled aging of the product is an enhancement to the final overall enjoyment of a good steak. Aging can be done under vacuum packaging (wet aging) or open-air (dry aging), under temperature controlled conditions. This stimulates the natural enzymes in the meat, thus creating tenderization. When doing this, it also imparts a subtle enhanced flavor to the meats. It is costly to age meat as the retailer assumes the drip loss (vacuum packing) or evaporation loss (dry aging) but makes for a superior end result.

Pork is not graded like beef, but is based on quality and yield standards. Here at Inboden's, we buy only breed specific pork, young Duroc and Berkshire hogs that are hand sorted for specific marbling requirements (high marbled pork), which again, is in the very top percentages of harvest. This process was began by exporters that were sorting for export to the Asian markets. The finest of our harvest was being sent out for export. We have been fortunate enough to build supplier relationships that have allowed our company to procure from this hand selected pool, thus ensuring our retail customers a more consistent, juicier cut of pork. Our lamb is USDA inspected and graded and the majority of the lamb we sell is USDA Prime. Racks, loins, ribs, and legs are available, along with hand cut lamb stew meat and ground lamb.

If you have any quality concerns or questions or are just curious about meats, please feel free to ask our staff as we will be more than happy to further elaborate on the above information or any other questions that you may have about meats to the best of our knowledge. If we don't have the answer, we have relationships built with meat scientists at the several universities that can also advise and educate our personnel and the consumer.

Thank you
Inbodens Meats LTD
Dekalb IL
815-756-5852