



## **ORGANOLEPTIC EXAMINATION**

### **Purpose**

This instruction defines policies and procedures for organoleptic examination of products.

### **Policy**

All certified product shall be examined for condition requirements at the time of initial certification and as necessary at each subsequent stage of processing. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure products are received, presented, and maintained in excellent condition through all stages of production.

#### **I. Procedures for Red Meat**

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.

##### **A. 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 not 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.

##### **B. 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 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 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 = Minimal Excellent Condition Requirements**

Cut surfaces and naturally, exposed lean surfaces show a slight darkening or discoloration due to dehydration, aging, and 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.

### **C. 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.

### **D. 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.

## **II. Procedures for Poultry**

For product exhibiting any of the following characteristics, the affected product must be removed from the pack and, if detected during an official sample, recorded as a defect. Additionally, graders shall inform the FSIS Inspector-in-Charge (IIC) for further disposition.

1. Slippery or slimy condition of the skin or flesh, noticeable first between the wing and body, leg and body, or in the neck area.



2. Greenish cast over the back and between the thigh and rib. This greenish cast shall not be confused with pigmentation that may appear in the abdominal area in chickens.
3. Mold growth appearing anywhere on the product.
4. Putrid or sour odors.
5. Bruises, mangling, or mutilation in excess of that permitted for C quality.
6. Contamination with any foreign material.

Richard H. Lawson, National Poultry Supervisor  
Quality Assessment Division  
Livestock and Poultry Program

---

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

---