United States
Department of
Agriculture

Agricultural
Marketing
Service

Livestock
and Seed
Division

# United States Standards for Grades of Slaughter Cattle

**Effective date July 1, 1996**

# United States Standards for Grades of Slaughter Cattle

The following is a reprint of the Official United States standards for the grades of slaughter cattle promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture under the Agriculture Marketing Act of 1946 (60 Stat. 1087; 7 U.S.C. 1621-1627) as amended and related authority in the annual appropriation acts for the Department of Agriculture. The standards are reprinted with amendments effective July 1, 1996.

## Development of the Standards

The Department of Agriculture has long recognized the importance of a uniform system of grading slaughter cattle in order to facilitate the production, marketing, and distribution of livestock and meats. The initial U.S. standards for grades of beef were formulated in 1916 when plans were made for reporting wholesale meat prices by grades. In 1918 the Department adopted a tentative schedule for market classes and grades of cattle and initiated market reporting. Tentative standards for market classes and grades of cattle were published in 1925.

The use of the tentative standards for live animals resulted in a more uniform dissemination of market information which proved to be of decided value to both cattle producers and buyers. Therefore, Office United States Standards for Graders of Slaughter Cattle were promulgated by the Secretary of Agriculture in July 1928 and published in Service and Regulatory Announcement No. 112.

The Official standards were amended in July 1939 so as to change the grade designation Lower Cutter to Canner. A second amendment issued in December 1950 combined the standards for grades of slaughter steers, heifers, and cows into a single standard, specified the minimum requirements for each grade, and made such other changes in the standards as were necessary to make them coincide with the revised standards for grades of beef which became effective December 29, 1950. The grade standards applicable to slaughter steers and heifers were changed as follows: The Prime and Choice grades were combined under the designation of Prime. The Good grade designation was changed to Choice. The Medium grade was divided into two grades-Good and Commercial-the Good grade including young cattle (under approximately 48 months of age) previously included in the Medium grade. The Common grade designation was changed to Utility. The Cutter and Canner grades were not changed. The grade standards applicable to vows were changed to make possible the inclusion in each grade of all cows expected to produce the corresponding grade of beef. Grade standards for bulls and stags were relatively unchanged except for designating Medium and Common as Commercial and Utility, respectively. The official standards were amended in June 1956 to divide the Commercial grade for steers, heifers, and cows into two grades; Standards and Commercial, to coincide with similar changes in the standards for carcass beef. The term Standard was applied to cattle from the younger segment of the Commercial grade, with a maximum maturity of approximately 48 months

of age, and the term Commercial was retained for the more mature cattle in the grade. In April 1966, the slaughter cattle grade standards were changed to reflect the changes made in the beef carcass grade standards effective June 1, 1965. This change reduced the marbling requirements one and one half degrees for Prime, one degree for Choice and three quarters of a degree for Good and Standard carcasses from cattle about 30 months of age and older with progressively smaller reductions made for carcasses from younger animals. Also, five yield grades were established to identify differences in cutability of yield of boneless, closely trimmed retail cuts. These yield grades were numbered 1 through 5 with Yield Grade 1 representing the highest yield of cuts and Yield Grade 5 the lowest.

In July 1973 the official standards were revised to reflect changes that were made concurrently in the beef carcass grade standards. That change established a separate class for young bulls under about 24 months of age and "Bullock" was designated as the name for this class. Quality grade standards were adopted for bullocks which were essentially the same as those for steers of comparable maturity. "Bull" was retained as the class designation for older bulls but quality grades for this class were eliminated. Thus, yield grades became the only grades applicable to animals in the "Bull" class. The "Stag" class and the quality grade standards for stags also were eliminated and animals formerly included in that class were included in the "Bullock" or "Bull" class dependent on their evidences of age.

In April 1975 the official standards for slaughter steers, heifers, cows, and bullocks were revised to reflect concurrent changes that were made in the grade standards for the corresponding classes of beef carcasses. Three of these changes included: (1) deleting conformation as a factor in determining the quality grade, (2) reducing the maximum maturity for slaughter steers, heifers, and cows in the Good and Standard grades-and the minimum maturity for these classes of slaughter cattle in the Commercial grade-form about 48 months to about 42 months of age, and (3) providing that the official grade of a slaughter steer, heifer, cow, or bullock include both the quality grade and yield grade. A fourth change in the beef carcass grade standards eliminated maturity as a factor in determining the quality grades for bullock carcasses and for carcasses of steer, heifers, and cows in the youngest (A) maturity group referenced in the standards (up to about 30 months of age). This change resulted in marbling becoming the primary consideration in determining the quality grade for bullock carcasses and for A maturity carcasses from steers, heifers, and cows. In the Prime, Choice, and Standard grades, the minimum marbling required in each of these grades for the very youngest carcasses considered as beef. However, for the Good grade, the minimum marbling requirement for such carcasses was increased to the level previously required for beef at mid-point A maturity. For the youngest steer, heifer, and cow carcasses in the next older (B) maturity group, the minimum marbling requirements in each of the grades were reduced to coordinate them with the revised marbling requirements for A maturity beef and the principle of requiring an increase in marbling for increases in maturity throughout this range of maturity was retained. These changes in the beef carcass standards were not considered sufficient to require a change in the quality grade descriptions for slaughter bullocks or for slaughter steers, heifers, or cows under about 30 months of age. However, for slaughter steers, heifers, and cows about 30 to 42 months of age, slightly reduced levels of quality actions challenging the legality of the above-referenced revisions in the beef grade standards, the effective date-April 14, 1975-of these changes in the slaughter cattle standards was delayed until the beef carcass grade standards

became effective on February 23, 1976.

In November 1987, the official standards were revised to change the name of the U.S. Good grade to U.S. Select. The revision did not change the requirements for the grade, only the grade name.

In April 1989, the official standards were revised to allow the official grade to consist of the quality grade only, the yield grade only, or a combination of both. No change was made in the actual yield grade or quality grade requirements. The change was made to keep pace with the same change made in the carcass standards which allowed the industry greater flexibility in the use of the beef grading system in order to provide consumers with the trimness levels desired.

In January 1997, the official standards were revised to restrict the Select grade to A maturity only and to raise the marbling degree required for Choice to minimum modest throughout B maturity. These changes, which coincided with the carcass standards, were made to improve the uniformity and consistency within the Choice and Select grades.

**§53.201 Cattle.**

The official standards for live cattle developed by the United States Department of Agriculture provide for segregation first according to use -- slaughter and feeder -- then as to class, which is determined by sex condition, and then as to grade, which is determined by the apparent relative excellence and desirability of the animal for its particular use. Differentiation between slaughter and feeder cattle is based solely on their intended use rather than on specific identifiable characteristics of the cattle. Slaughter cattle are those which are intended for slaughter immediately or in the very near future. Feeder cattle are those which are intended for slaughter after a period of feeding. However, under some economic conditions specific kinds of cattle may be considered as feeders whereas under other economic conditions they might be considered as slaughter cattle.

**53.202 Classes of slaughter and feeder cattle.**

The classes of slaughter and feeder cattle are steers, bullocks, bulls, heifers, and cows. Definitions of the respective classes are as follows:

(a) *Steer.* A steer is a male bovine castrated when young and which has not begun to develop the secondary physical characteristics of a bull.

(b) *Bullock.* A bullock is a young (under approximately 24 months of age) male bovine (castrated or uncastrated) that has developed or begun to develop the secondary physical characteristics of a bull.

(c) *Bull.* A bull is a mature (approximately 24 months of age or older) uncastrated, male bovine. However, for the purpose of these standards, any mature, castrated, male bovine which has developed or begun to develop the secondary physical characteristics of an uncastrated male also will be considered a bull.

(d) *Cow.* A cow is a female bovine that has developed through reproduction or with age, the relatively prominent hips, large middle, and other physical characteristics typical of mature females.

(e) *Heifer*. A heifer is an immature female bovine that has not developed the physical characteristics typical of cows.

**§53.203 Application of standards for grades of slaughter cattle.**

(a) *General.* Grades of slaughter cattle are intended to be directly related to the grades of the carcasses they produce. To accomplish this, these slaughter cattle grade standards are based on factors which are related to the grades of beef carcasses. The quality and yield grade standards are contained in separate sections of the standards. The quality grade standards are further divided into two sections applicable to: (1) Steers, heifers, and cows and (2) bullocks. Eight quality designations -- Prime, Choice, Select, Standard, Commercial, Utility, Cutter, and Canner -- are applicable to steers and heifers. Except for Prime, the same designations also apply to cows. The quality designations for bullocks are Prime, Choice, Select, Standard, and Utility. There are five yield grades, which are applicable to all classes of slaughter cattle and are designated by numbers 1 through 5, with Yield Grade 1 representing the highest degree of cutability. The grades of slaughter cattle may consist of the quality grade only, the yield grade only, or a combination of the quality grade and the yield grade except that slaughter bulls are yield graded only.

(b) *Quality Grades*. (1) Slaughter cattle quality grades are based on an evaluation of factors related to the palatability of the lean, herein referred to as "quality." Quality in slaughter cattle is evaluated primarily by the amount and distribution of finish, the firmness of muscling, and the physical characteristics of the animal associated with maturity. Progressive changes in maturity past 30 months of age and in the amount and distribution of finish and firmness of muscling have opposite effects on quality. Therefore, for cattle over 30 months of age in each grade, the standards require a progressively greater development of the other quality-indicating factors. In cattle under about 30 months of age, a progressively greater development of the other quality-indicating characteristics is not required.

(2) Since carcass indices of quality are not directly evident in slaughter cattle, some other factors in which differences can be noted must be used to evaluate their quality. Therefore, the amount of external finish is included as a major grade factor herein, even though cattle with a specific degree of fatness may have widely varying degrees of quality. Identification of differences in quality among cattle with the same degree of fatness is based on distribution of finish and firmness of muscling. Descriptions of these factors are included in the specifications. For example, cattle which have more fullness of the brisket, flank, twist, and cod or udder and which have firmer muscling than that indicated by any particular degree of fatness are considered to have higher quality than indicated by the degree of fatness.

(3) The approximate maximum age limitation for the Prime, Choice, and Standard grades of steers, heifers, and cows is 42 months. The maximum age limitation for the Select grade for steers, heifers, and cows is approximately 30 months. The Commercial grade for steers, heifers, and cows includes only cattle over approximately 42 months. There are no age limitations for the Utility, Cutter, and Canner grades of steers, heifers, and cows. The maximum age limitation for

all grades of bullocks is approximately 24 months.[1]

(c) *Yield Grades*. (1) The yield grades for slaughter cattle are based on the same factors as used in the official yield grade standards for beef carcasses. Those factors and the change in each which is required to make a full yield grade change are as follows:

| Factor | Effect of increase on yield grade[1] | Approximate change in each factor required to make a full yield grade change[2] |
|---|---|---|
| Thickness of fat over ribeye. | Decreases | 4/10 in. |
| Percent of kidney, pelvic and heart fat..... | Decreases | 5% |
| Carcass Weight..... | Decreases | 260 lb. |
| Area of Ribeye..... | Increases | 3 in.$^2$ |

[1]The yield grades are denoted by numbers 1 through 5 with Yield Grade 1 representing the highest cutability or yield of closely trimmed retail cuts. Thus, an "increase" in cutability means a smaller yield grade number while a "decrease" in cutability means a larger yield grade number.
[2]This assumes no change in the other factors.

(2) When evaluating slaughter cattle for yield grade, each of these factors can be estimated and the yield grade determined therefrom by using the equation contained in the official standards for grades of carcass beef. However, a more practical method of appraising slaughter cattle for yield grade is to use only two factors normally considered in evaluating live cattle -- muscling and fatness.

(3) In the latter approach to determining yield grade, evaluation of the thickness and fullness of muscling in relation to skeletal size largely accounts for the effects of two of the factors -- area of ribeye and carcass weight. By the same token, an appraisal of the degree of external fatness largely accounts for the effects of thickness of fat over the ribeye and the percent of kidney, pelvic, and heart fat.

(4) These fatness and muscling evaluations can best be made simultaneously. This is accomplished by considering the development of the various parts based on an understanding of

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[1]Maximum maturity limits for bullock carcasses are the same as those described in the beef carcass standards for steer, heifers, and cows at about 30 months of age. However, bullocks develop carcass indicators of maturity at younger chronological ages than steers. Therefore, the approximate age at which bullocks develop carcass indicators of maximum maturity is shown herein as 24 rather than 30 months.

how each part is affected by variations in muscling and fatness. While muscling of most cattle develops uniformly, fat is normally deposited at a considerably faster rate on some parts than on others. Therefore, muscling can be appraised best by giving primary consideration to the parts least affected by fatness, such as the round and the forearm. Differences in thickness and fullness of these parts -- with appropriate adjustments for the effects of variations in fatness -- are the best indicators of the overall degree of muscling in live cattle.

(5) On the other hand, the overall fatness of an animal can be determined best by observing those parts on which fat is deposited at a faster-than-average rate. These include the back, loin, rump, flank, cod or udder, twist, and brisket. As cattle increase in fatness, these parts appear progressively fuller, thicker, and more distended in relation to the thickness and fullness of the other parts, particularly the round. In thinly muscled cattle with a low degree of finish, the width of the back usually will be greater than the width through the center of the round. The back on either side of the backbone also will be flat or slightly sunken. Conversely, in thickly muscled cattle with a similar degree of finish, the thickness through the rounds will be greater than through the back and the back will appear full and rounded. At an intermediate degree of fatness, cattle which are thickly muscled will be about the same width through the round and back and the back will appear only slightly rounded. Thinly muscled cattle with an intermediate degree of finish will be considerably wider through the back than through the round and will be nearly flat across the back. Very fat cattle will be wider through the back than through the round, but this difference will be greater in thinly muscled cattle than in those that are thickly muscled. Such cattle with thin muscling also will have a distinct break from the back into the sides, while those with thick muscling will be nearly flat on top but will have a less distinct break into the sides. As cattle increase in fatness, they also become deep bodied because of large deposits of fat in the flanks and brisket and along the underline. Fullness of the twist and cod or udder and the bulge of the flanks, best observed when an animal walks, are other indications of fatness.

(6) In determining yield grade, variations in fatness are much more important than variations in muscling.

(d) Other considerations. (1) Other factors such as heredity and management also may affect the development of the grade-determining characteristics in slaughter cattle. Although these factors do not lend themselves to description in the standards, the use of factual information of this nature is justifiable in determining the grade of slaughter cattle.

(2) Slaughter cattle qualifying for any particular grade may vary with respect to the relative development of the individual grade factors. In fact, some will qualify for a particular grade although they have some characteristics more nearly typical of cattle of another grade. Because it is impractical to describe the nearly infinite number of recognizable combinations of characteristics, the quality and yield grade standards describe only cattle which have a relatively similar development of the various quality and yield grade determining factors and which are near the lower limits of these grades. The requirements are given for two maturity groups in the quality grade standards for steers, heifers, and cows -- but for only one maturity group for bullocks. In the yield grade standards, cattle with two levels of muscling are described and specific examples in terms of carcass characteristics also are included.

**§53.204 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of slaughter steers, heifers, and cows (quality).**

(a) *Prime*. (1) Slaughter steers and heifers 30 to 42 months of age possessing the minimum qualifications for Prime have a fat covering over the crops, back, ribs, loin, and rump that tends to be thick. The brisket, flanks, and cod or udder appear full and distended and the muscling is very firm. The fat covering tends to be smooth with only slight indications of patchiness. Steers and heifers under 30 months of age have a moderately thick but smooth covering of fat which extends over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. The brisket, flanks, and cod or udder show a marked fullness and the muscling is firm.

(2) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of the Prime grade will differ considerably in cutability because of varying combinations of muscling and degree of fatness. Cattle with higher cutability than normal for this grade are thickly muscled and have a lower degree of fatness than described for the Prime grade. Such cattle have less width of back and loin and are less uniform in width than normal for the Prime grade. The thick, full muscling gives the back and loin a well-rounded appearance with very little evidence of flatness. The thickness through the middle part of the rounds is greater than over the top and the thick muscling through the shoulders causes them to be slightly prominent. Although such cattle have a lower degree of fatness over the back and loin than described as typical, evidence of more fatness than described is noticeable in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder and the muscling is firmer than described. Conversely, cattle with lower cutability than normal for this grade are thinly muscled and have a higher degree of fatness than described for the Prime grade. The distribution of fat is not typical, for it is thicker over the crops, back, loin, and rump than described while the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder indicate less fatness. Such cattle are wide and nearly flat over the back and loin and there is a sharp break from these parts into the sides. The width over the back is much greater than through the rounds and shoulders.

(3) Cows are not eligible for the Prime grade.

(b) *Choice*. (1) Slaughter steers, heifers, and cows 30 to 42 months of age possessing the minimum qualifications for Choice have a fat covering over the crops, back, loin, rump, and ribs that tends to be moderately thick. The brisket, flanks, and cod or udder show a marked fullness and the muscling is firm. Cattle under 30 months of age carry a slightly thick fat covering over the top. The brisket, flanks, and cod or udder appear moderately full and the muscling is moderately firm.

(2) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of the Choice grade will differ considerably in cutability because of varying combinations of muscling and degree of fatness. Cattle with higher cutability than normal for this grade are thickly muscled and have a lower degree of fatness than described for the Choice grade. Such cattle are less uniform in width than normal for the Choice grade. The thick, full muscling over the top results in a rounded appearance with little evidence of flatness. The thickness through the middle part of the rounds is greater than over the top and the thick muscling through the shoulders causes them to be slightly prominent. Although such cattle have a lower degree of fatness over the back and loin than described as typical, evidence of more fatness than described is especially noticeable in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder and the muscling is firmer than described. Conversely, cattle with lower cutability than normal for this

grade are thinly muscled and have a higher degree of fatness than described for the Choice grade. The distribution of fat is not typical, for it is thicker over the crops, back, loin, and rump than described but with evidence of less fatness in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder. The back and loin break sharply into the sides and the width over the back is much greater than through the rounds and shoulders.

(c) *Select.* (1). The Select grade is limited to steers, heifers, and cows with a maximum age limitation of approximately 30 months. Slaughter cattle possessing the minimum qualifications for Select have a thin fat covering which is largely restricted to the back and loin. The brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder are slightly full and the muscling is slightly firm.

(2) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of the Select grade will differ considerably in cutability because of varying combinations of muscling and degree of fatness. Cattle with higher cutability than normal for this grade are thickly muscled and have a lower degree of fatness than described for the Select grade. Such cattle are less uniform in width than normal for the grade. The thick, full muscling through the back gives the back and loin a well-rounded appearance. The thickness through the middle part of the rounds is greater than over the top and the thick muscling through the shoulders causes them to be prominent. Evidence of more fatness than described is especially noticeable in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder and the muscling is firmer than described. Conversely, cattle with lower cutability than normal for the grade are thinly muscled and have a higher degree of fatness than described for the Select grade. The distribution of fat is not typical, for it is thicker over the crops, back, loin, and rump than described while the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder indicate less fatness. Such cattle are nearly flat over the back and loin and the width over the back is greater than through the rounds and shoulders.

(d) *Standard*. (1) Slaughter steers, heifers, and cows 30 to 42 months of age possessing the minimum qualifications for Standard have a fat covering primarily over the back, loin, and ribs which tends to be very thin. Cattle under 30 months of age have a very thin covering of fat which is largely restricted to the back, loin, and upper ribs.

(2) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of this grade vary relatively little in their degree of fatness. Therefore, the range in cutability among cattle that qualify for this grade is somewhat less than in the higher grades. Most of the cutability differences among cattle qualifying for this grade are due to a wide range in muscling. Cattle with higher cutability than normal for this grade may have a slightly lower degree of fatness than described but will have thick, well-rounded backs, wide loins, and prominent, thickly muscled shoulders. The width through the rounds will be greater than over the back. Cattle with lower cutability than normal for this grade may have slightly more finish than described and will be upstanding and narrow. The loin, rump, and rounds will appear slightly sunken.

(e) *Commercial*. (1) The Commercial grade is limited to steers, heifers, and cows over approximately 42 months of age. Slaughter cattle possessing the minimum qualifications for Commercial and which slightly exceed the minimum maturity for the Commercial grade have a slightly thick fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump and the muscling is moderately firm. Very mature cattle usually have at least a moderately thick fat covering over the back, ribs, loin, and rump and considerable patchiness frequently is evident about the tail-head. The brisket, flanks, and cod or udder appear to be moderately full and the muscling is firm.

(2) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of the Commercial grade will differ considerably in

cutability because of widely varying combinations of muscling and degree of fatness. Cattle with higher cutability than normal for this grade are thickly muscled and have a lower degree of fatness than described for the Commercial grade. The thick, full muscling over the top results in a rounded appearance with little evidence of flatness. The thickness through the middle part of the rounds is greater than over the top and the thick muscling through the shoulders causes them to be slightly prominent. Although such cattle have less thickness of fat over the back and loin than described as typical, evidence of more fatness than described is especially noticeable in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder and the muscling is firmer than described. Conversely, cattle with lower cutability than normal for this grade are thinly muscled and have a higher degree of fatness than described for the Commercial grade. The distribution of fat is not typical, being thicker over the crops, back, loin, and rump than described while the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder indicate less fatness. The back and loin break sharply into the sides and the width over the back is much greater than through the rounds and shoulders.

(f) *Utility*. (1) The minimum degree of finish required for slaughter steers, heifers, and cows to qualify for the Utility grade varies throughout the range of maturity permitted in this grade from a very thin covering of fat for cattle under 30 months of age to a slightly thick fat covering, generally restricted to the back, loin, and rump for the very mature cattle in this grade. In such mature cattle, the crops are slightly thin and the brisket, flanks, and cod or udder indicate very slight fullness.

(2) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of the Utility grade vary somewhat in cutability especially among older animals. Those under 42 months of age are required to have very little fatness to qualify for the minimum of the grade; thus most of the variation in cutability of such cattle is due to differences in muscling. Cattle over 42 months of age will vary in their degree of fatness as well as muscling. Thus, cattle with thicker muscling than normal and less external fat than specified for this grade will have higher cutability than cattle with thinner muscling and more fatness.

(g) *Cutter*. (1) In slaughter cattle in the Cutter grade, the degree of finish ranges from practically none in cattle under 30 months of age to very mature cattle which have only a very thin covering of fat.

(2) The range in cutability among cattle that qualify for the minimum of this grade will be narrow because of very small variations in fatness and muscling.

(h) *Canner*. Canner grade cattle are those which are inferior to the minimum specified for the Cutter grade.

**§53.205 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of slaughter bullocks (quality).**

(a) *Prime.* (1) Slaughter bullocks possessing the minimum qualifications for the Prime grade have a moderately thick but smooth covering of fat which extends over the back, ribs, loin, and rump. The brisket and flanks show a marked fullness and the muscling is firm.

(2) Bullocks qualifying for the minimum of the Prime grade will differ considerably in cutability because of varying combinations of muscling and degree of fatness. Bullocks with higher cutability than normal for this grade are thickly muscled and have a lower degree of fatness than described as minimum for the Prime grade. Such bullocks have less width of back and loin

and are less uniform in width than described as typical for the Prime grade but the muscling is firmer than described. Conversely, bullocks with lower cutability than normal for this grade are thinly muscled and have a higher degree of fatness than described as minimum for the Prime grade.

(b) *Choice*. (1) Slaughter bullocks possessing minimum qualifications for the Choice grade carry a slightly thick fat covering over the top. The brisket and flanks appear moderately full and the muscling is moderately firm.

(2) Bullocks qualifying for the minimum of the Choice grade will differ considerably in cutability because of varying combinations of muscling and degree of fatness. Bullocks with higher cutability than normal for this grade are thickly muscled and have a lower degree of fatness than described as minimum for the Choice grade but the muscling is firmer than described. Conversely, bullocks with lower cutability than normal for this grade are thinly muscled and have a higher degree of fatness than described as minimum for the Choice grade.

(c) *Select*. (1) Slaughter bullocks possessing minimum qualifications for the Select grade have a thin fat covering which is largely restricted to the back and loin. The brisket and flanks are slightly full and the muscling is slightly firm.

(2) Bullocks qualifying for the minimum of the Select grade will differ considerably in cutability because of varying combinations of muscling and degree of fatness. Bullocks with higher cutability than normal for the grade are thickly muscled and have a lower degree of fatness than described as minimum for the Select grade. Such bullocks are less uniform in width than described as typical of the grade but the muscling is firmer than described. Conversely, bullocks with lower cutability than normal for this grade have thinner muscling and a higher degree of fatness than described as minimum for the Select grade.

(d) *Standard*. (1) Slaughter bullocks possessing minimum qualifications for the Standard grade have only a very thin covering of fat which is largely restricted to the back, loin, and upper rib.

(2) Bullocks qualifying for the minimum of this grade vary relatively little in their degree of fatness. Therefore, the range in cutability among bullocks that qualify for this grade is somewhat less than in the higher grades. Most of the cutability differences among bullocks qualifying for this grade are due to a wide range in muscling. Bullocks with higher cutability than normal for this grade may have a slightly lower degree of fatness than described but will have thick, well-rounded backs, wide loins, and prominent, thickly muscled shoulders. The width through the rounds will be greater than over the back. Bullocks with lower cutability than normal for this grade may have slightly more finish than described and will be upstanding and narrow. The loin, rump, and rounds will appear slightly sunken.

(e) *Utility*. The Utility grade includes only those bullocks that do not meet the minimum requirements specified for the Standard grade.

**§53.206 Specifications for official U.S. standards for grades of slaughter cattle (yield).**

(a) *Yield Grade 1*. (1) Yield Grade 1 slaughter cattle produce carcasses with very high yields of boneless retail cuts. Cattle with characteristics qualifying them for the lower limits of Yield Grade 1 (near the borderline between Yield Grade 1 and Yield Grade 2) will differ considerably in appearance because of inherent differences in the development of their muscling and skeletal

systems and related differences in fatness.

(2) Very thickly muscled cattle typical of the minimum of this grade have a high proportion of lean to bone. They are moderately wide and the width through the shoulders and rounds is greater than through the back. The top is well-rounded with no evidence of flatness, and the back and loin are thick and full. The rounds are deep, thick, and full and the width through the middle part of the rounds is greater than through the back. The shoulders are slightly prominent and the forearms are thick and full. These cattle have only a thin covering of fat over the back and rump. The flanks are slightly shallow and the brisket and cod or udder have little evidence of fullness. Slaughter cattle of this description producing 600-pound carcasses usually have about 0.3 of an inch of fat over the ribeye and about 13.0 square inches of ribeye area.

(3) Because of the relatively low proportion of lean to bone, practically no thinly muscled cattle produce carcasses with an exceptionally high yield of boneless retail cuts. Therefore, it is unlikely that thinly muscled cattle will qualify for Yield Grade 1.

(4) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of Yield Grade 1 will differ widely in quality grade as a result of variations in distribution of finish and firmness of muscling. For example, young cattle which have considerable firmness of muscling and considerably greater deposits of fat in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder than described for Yield Grade 1 ordinarily will qualify for the Select or Choice grade. However, such cattle with typical or less than typical deposits of fat in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder usually will qualify for the Standard or Utility grade.

(b) *Yield Grade 2*. (1) Yield Grade 2 slaughter cattle produce carcasses with high yields of boneless retail cuts. Cattle with characteristics qualifying them for the lower limits of Yield Grade 2 (near the borderline between Yield Grade 2 and Yield Grade 3) will differ considerably in appearance because of differences in the development of their muscling and skeletal systems and related differences in fatness.

(2) Very thickly muscled cattle typical of the minimum of this grade have a high proportion of lean to bone. They are wide through the back and loin and have slightly greater width through the shoulders and rounds than through the back. The top is well-rounded with little evidence of flatness and the back and loin are thick and full. The rounds are thick, full, and deep and the thickness through the middle part of the rounds is greater than that over the top. The shoulders are slightly prominent and the forearms are thick and full. There is a slightly thick covering of fat over the back and rump and the flanks are slightly deep. The brisket and cod or udder are slightly full. Slaughter cattle of this description producing 600-pound carcasses usually have about 0.6 of an inch of fat over the ribeye and about 12.5 square inches of ribeye area.

(3) Thinly muscled cattle typical of the minimum of this grade have a relatively low proportion of lean to bone. They tend to be flat and slightly narrow over the back and have slightly long, flat rounds. They are slightly wider over the back than through the rounds. The shoulders are slightly prominent and the forearms are only slightly thick. These cattle have a thin covering of fat over the back and rump. The flanks are slightly shallow and thin and the brisket and cod or udder have little evidence of fullness. Slaughter cattle of this description producing 600 - pound carcasses usually have 0.3 of an inch of fat over the ribeye and about 10.0 square inches of ribeye area.

(4) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of Yield Grade 2 will differ greatly in quality grade as a result of variations in distribution of finish and firmness of muscling. For example, young cattle which have considerable firmness of muscling and typical or greater deposits of fat in the brisket,

flanks, twist, and cod or udder than described for Yield Grade 2 ordinarily will qualify for Prime or Choice. Conversely, such cattle with less than typical deposits of fat in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder usually will qualify for the Select or Standard grade.

(c) *Yield Grade 3.* (1) Yield Grade 3 slaughter cattle produce carcasses with intermediate yields of boneless retail cuts. Cattle with characteristics qualifying them for the lower limits of Yield Grade 3 (near the borderline between Yield Grades 3 and 4) will differ considerably in appearance because of inherent differences in the development of their muscling and skeletal systems and related differences in fatness.

(2) Very thickly muscled cattle typical of the minimum of this grade have a high proportion of lean to bone. They are very wide through the back and loin and are uniform in width from front to rear. The back or top is nearly flat with only a slight tendency toward roundness and there is a slight break into the sides. The back and loin are very full and thick. The rounds are deep, thick, and full. The shoulders are smooth and the forearms are thick and full. There is a moderately thick covering of fat over the back and rump. The flanks are deep and full and the brisket and cod or udder are full. Slaughter cattle of this description producing 600-pound carcasses usually have about 0.9 of an inch of fat over the ribeye and about 12.0 square inches of ribeye area.

(3) Thinly muscled cattle typical of the minimum of this grade have a relatively low proportion of lean to bone. They are flat and slightly wide over the back and loin and are wider over the back than through the rounds. The shoulders are slightly smooth and the forearms are only slightly thick. These cattle tend to have a slightly thick covering of fat over the back and rump. The flanks are slightly deep and full and the brisket and cod or udder are slightly full. Slaughter cattle of this description producing 600-pound carcasses usually have about 0.6 of an inch of fat over the ribeye and about 9.5 square inches of ribeye area.

(4) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of Yield Grade 3 will differ greatly in quality grade as a result of wide variations in distribution of finish and firmness of muscling. Cattle with higher quality than normal for the minimum of this grade will have very firm muscling and will have greater deposits of fat in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder than described for Yield Grade 3 and will normally qualify for the Prime or Choice grade. Conversely, cattle with lower quality than normal for the minimum of this grade will have less deposits of fat in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder than described herein, and may only qualify for the Select grade.

(d) *Yield Grade 4.* (1) Yield Grade 4 slaughter cattle produce carcasses with moderately low yields of boneless retail cuts. Cattle with characteristics qualifying them for the lower limits of Yield Grade 4 (near the borderline between Yield Grades 4 and 5) will differ considerably in appearance because of inherent differences in the development of their muscling and skeletal systems and related differences in fatness.

(2) Very thickly muscled cattle typical of the minimum of this grade have a high proportion of lean to bone. They appear wider over the top than through the shoulders or rounds. The back and loin are very thick and full, nearly flat, and break sharply into the sides. The rounds are deep, thick, and full. The shoulders are smooth and the forearms are thick and full. These cattle have a thick covering of fat over the back and rump. The flanks are very deep and full and the brisket and cod or udder are very full. Slaughter cattle of this description producing 600-pound carcasses usually have about 1.1 inches of fat over the ribeye and about 11.5 square inches of ribeye area.

(3) Thinly muscled cattle typical of the minimum of this grade have a relatively low ratio of

lean to bone. They are flat over the back and loin and much wider through the back than through the shoulders or rounds. The rounds tend to be long and flat. The shoulders are smooth and the forearms are slightly thick. These cattle have a moderately thick covering of fat over the back and rump and the back breaks sharply into the sides. The flanks are deep and full and the brisket and cod or udder are full. Slaughter cattle of this description producing 600-pound carcasses usually have about 0.9 of an inch of fat over the ribeye and about 9.0 square inches of ribeye area.

(4) Cattle qualifying for the minimum of Yield Grade 4 will differ somewhat in quality grade as a result of variations in distribution of the finish and firmness of muscling. Most cattle at the minimum of this grade will qualify for the Prime or Choice grade. However, some cattle at the minimum of Yield Grade 4 with less deposits of fat in the brisket, flanks, twist, and cod or udder than described as typical may only qualify for the Select grade.

(e) *Yield Grade 5.* (1) Yield Grade 5 slaughter cattle produce carcasses with low yields of boneless retail cuts. Cattle of this grade consist of those not meeting the minimum requirements for Yield Grade 4 because of either more fat or less muscle or a combination of these characteristics.

(2) Because of the high degree of finish required for cattle of this grade, the range in quality grades will be somewhat small. Practically all cattle of this grade will qualify for either the Prime or Choice grade.