

COMPARISONS TO THE U.S.D.A. (American) GRADING SYSTEM

The Canadian marbling standards were changed in 1996. Today we use the copyrighted standards used in the United States. The minimum marbling standards used for USDA Prime (slightly abundant), Choice (small) and Select (slight) are the same standards used in Canada to segregate the youthful quality carcasses into Canada Prime, AAA and AA respectively. Canada A has no comparable USDA grade. Canada A is restricted to youthful quality carcasses that have at least traces less than slight marbling.

To establish the degree of similarity in assignment of beef quality grades in the U.S.A. and Canada, two studies were conducted in 1994 on over 4,600 carcasses in the two countries. The studies were conducted by the National Grade Standards Officers of both countries who assessed each of the 4,600 carcasses independently and assigned a final quality grade to the carcass. This study showed that there is a high degree association (approximately 85%) between the marbling standards of the Canadian and American high quality beef grades. It is important to note that since this study, Canada adopted the copyrighted USDA standards for slight, small and slightly abundant marbling.

Canada's grade classification is hierarchic in nature. Canada has muscling, color and fat color and cover minimum requirements for our four quality grades. Quality factors in the United States are weighted and one factor may be able to compensate for a deficiency in another factor. The Canadian grading system allows no "quality attribute offsets."

The American system will allow carcasses from animals up to 42 months of age (B age category) to stay in their Prime, Choice and Standard grades if the carcasses show higher levels of marbling. The Canadian grading system will automatically remove all Mature animals (over 30 months of age based on physiological criteria) from the four high quality grades (A/AA/AAA/Prime) to either the "D" or "E" grades.

The American system will penalize black cutter (black color) beef by no more than one full grade (ie. Prime to Choice, Choice to Select, or Select to Standard). Dark cutter (dark color) beef will be discounted by less than one full grade (ie. High Choice to Low Choice). It is therefore possible for dark coloured beef to be graded Choice, Select, or Standard in the United States. The Canadian grading system will automatically remove all dark cutter beef from the four high quality grades (A/AA/AAA/Prime) to the B4 grade.

The American system does not recognize yellow fat as a quality discount factor. The Canadian grading system will automatically remove all carcasses with yellow fat from the four high quality grades (A/AA/AAA/Prime) to the B2 grade.

The American system does not have a minimum muscling requirement for its top grades. The Canadian grading system will automatically remove all carcasses with poor muscling from the four high quality grades (A/AA/AAA/Prime) to the B3 grade.

The American system will allow moderately firm textured beef in the USDA Prime grade, slightly firm textured beef in the USDA Choice grade, slightly soft textured beef in the USDA Select grade, and soft textured beef in the USDA Standard grade. The Canadian grading system will allow only firm textured beef into the four high quality grades (A/AA/AAA/Prime). The Canadian grading system will automatically remove all carcasses with less than firm texture from the four high quality grades (A/AA/AAA/Prime) to the B grades. The level of marbling in Canada Prime included the marbling levels in the American Prime.

The level of marbling in Canada AAA includes the marbling levels in the American Choice grade. The level of marbling in Canada AA includes the marbling levels in the American Select grade. Although the level of marbling in Canada A includes the upper- marbling levels in the American Standard grade, the USDA Standard grade is not considered a high-quality grade due to numerous quality defect allowances.

The American grading system uses 5 yield classifications (Y 1-5). The Canadian grading system uses three yield classifications (Canada 1-3). The Canadian beef packing industry will discount all carcasses falling in the Canada 3 category, which is equivalent to the American Y 3-5 categories. The American beef packing industry generally discounts carcasses falling in their Y 4-5 categories. This indicates that the Canadian grain-fed cattle are encouraged to be higher yielding (less exterior and seam fat) than American grain-fed cattle. This is achieved through consistently high quality cattle genetics, environment, and feeding systems.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Canada Prime grade is virtually identical to the USDA. Prime grade, except that the Canadian grade does not allow black colored meat, yellow fat, older animals, or other off-quality characteristics. The Canada AAA grade is virtually identical to the USDA Choice grade, except that the Canadian grade does not allow dark colored meat, yellow fat, older animals, or other off-quality characteristics. The Canada AA grade has comparable marbling to the USDA. Select grade, but again the Canadian grade does not allow dark colored meat, yellow fat or other off-quality characteristics. The Canada A grade is unique to Canada in that there is less marbling but all other quality attributes are still present. This particular grade is well suited to those consumers now wishing to limit their level of fat intake while still wishing to enjoy the eating experience of high quality grain-fed beef.

The Government of Canada (Canadian Food Inspection Agency), in consultation with the Canadian beef industry, is constantly reviewing regulations to ensure that the safety and marketability of Canadian beef is maintained and improved. A consultation mechanism is in place which permits input from all sectors of the industry with regard to concerns about the inspection and grading systems.

Canada B Grades

A Canada B1 graded carcass has the same criteria as an A/AA/AAA/Prime graded carcass, except that it is devoid of marbling and/or it has less than 4 millimetres of external fat over the ribeye.

A Canada B2 grade is given to youthful carcasses that have yellow exterior fat.

A Canada B3 grade is given to youthful carcasses that have deficient muscling.

A Canada B4 grade is given to youthful carcasses that have dark coloured meat.

Canada D Grades

The D grades are for mature carcasses and are normally referred to as cow or commercial grades.

The CANADA D1 grade is given to mature carcasses with excellent muscling and external fat characteristics.

The CANADA D2 grade is given to mature carcasses that exhibit weaker muscling and have poorer external fat characteristics such as yellow fat.

A CANADA D3 grade is given to mature carcasses that have deficient muscling.

A CANADA D4 grade is given to mature carcasses with more than 15 millimetres of external fat over the rib eye.

Canada E Grade

The CANADA E grade is given to either youthful or mature carcasses of bulls or stags that exhibit pronounced masculinity.