

WHAT IS UNIFORM MEAT LABELING?

Frank A. Orts*

Shopping for meat has in the past been a very frustrating experience, what with a thousand different names for some 300 cuts of fresh meat. The same cuts of meat have been labeled differently in different sections of the country, and even in the same locale.

Therefore, the National Livestock and Meat Board, in cooperation with many governmental agencies, meat retailers, meat packers and industry organizations, has developed a set of Uniform Retail Meat Identity Standards. This system allows the use of "fanciful" names now seen in some markets, but requires, for those adopting the system, that these not be the most prominent names on the labels.

In most states, adopting the Uniform Retail Meat Identity Standards is strictly voluntary. Thus, some retailers are using the system while others have elected not to use the system.

Reasons for developing the Uniform Retail Meat Identity program were to:

1. Reduce confusion.
2. Enhance the consumer's Right to Know.
3. Improve existing meat labeling laws.

What Do The Standards Include?

The price label essentially will be the same as retail markets have used in the past. However, with the new uniform identity program, the label would include:

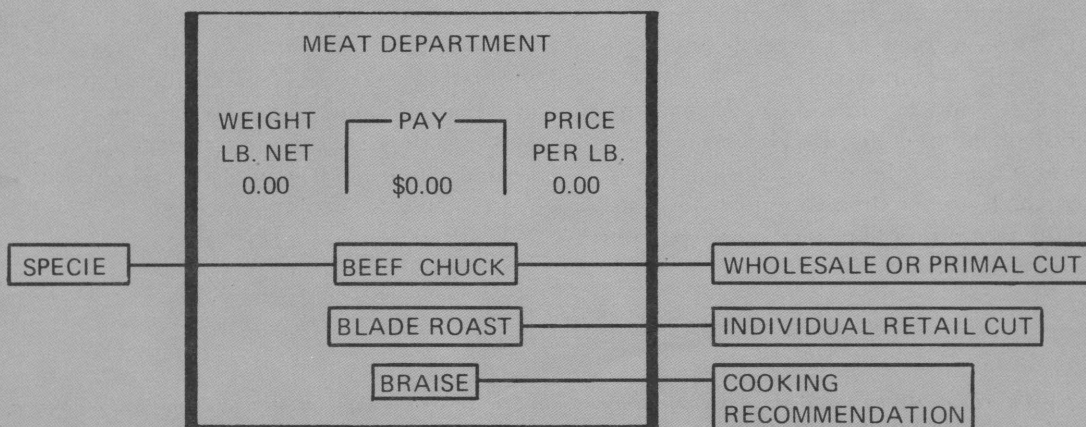
1. Specie from which the meat was derived (beef, lamb, pork or veal).
2. Location on the carcass or wholesale cut from which the retail cut was derived.
3. Recommended name for the retail cut.

The standards also provide for the inclusion of the recommended cooking method for each cut.

For example, a blade bone pot roast from the chuck would have the label shown in Figure 1.

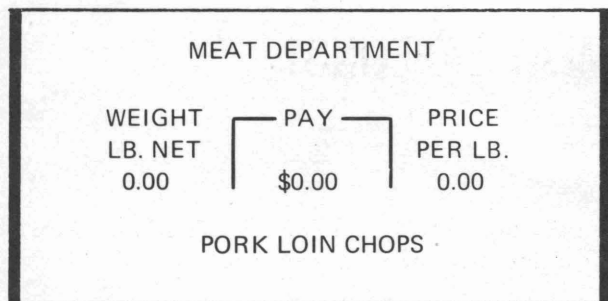
*Extension meats specialist, The Texas A&M University System.

Figure 1.



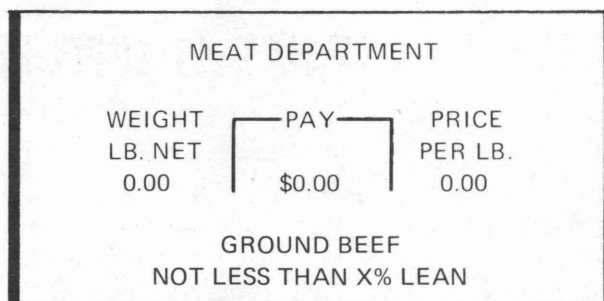
An example of how pork loin chops would be labeled is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2.



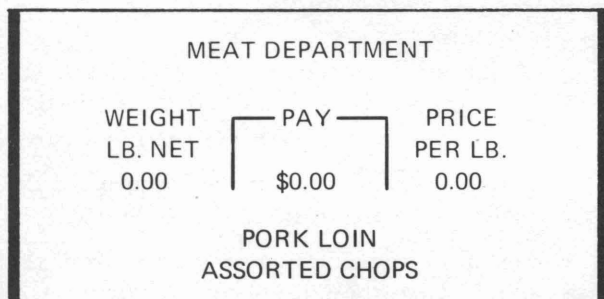
A ground beef label under the new identity system might appear as in Figure 4.

Figure 4.



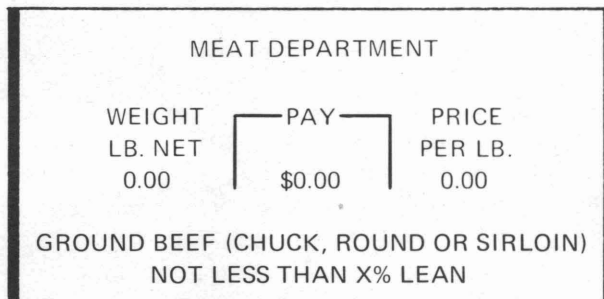
Under the uniform identity system, the recently popular 1/4 pork loin would have the label shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3.



A package of ground beef derived from a specific wholesale cut might be labeled as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5.



There is also a provision in the identity standards for the labeling of ground beef. The names ground round, chuck, chopped sirloin and hamburger, and the terms lean and extra lean, would no longer be used. Ground beef actually derived from the chuck, round or sirloin could have this information included on the label. The ground beef label would also contain the percentage of lean in the package, which, under the new standards, must be at least 70 percent. (The remaining portion would of course be fat.)

It is anticipated that the Uniform Retail Meat Identity Standards will be an aid to homemakers not only in meat shopping but also in preparation of the cuts purchased, especially in instances where the cooking method is included on the label. If the cooking recommendation is not given, the homemaker can normally associate the wholesale or primal cut from which the retail cut was derived with a specific cooking method.

Educational programs conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service serve people of all ages regardless of socio-economic levels, race, color, sex, religion or national origin.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, The Texas A&M University System and the United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8, 1914, as amended, and June 30, 1914.