

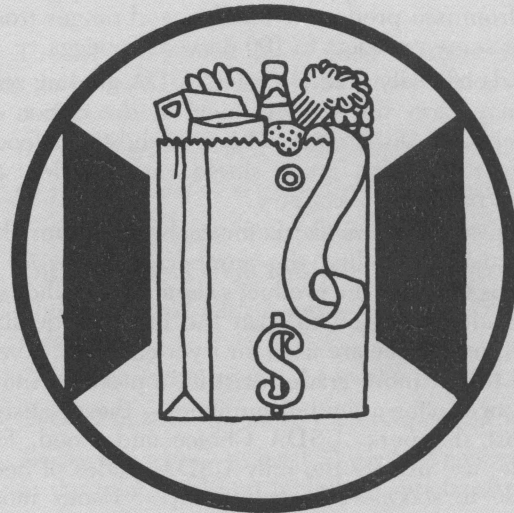
FACT SHEET

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STANDARDS AND GRADES CAN HELP YOU SHOP

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Food shopping is no longer a simple task. It is a management job with you as the top executive. Today's food selections are many. Understanding food standards and grades and their relationship to labeling can help you determine good values in terms of quality, cost variations and your family's health protection.

Standards describing foods are measuring sticks of the quality of ingredients in food products. Food standards assure uniformity of certain characteristics among brands of a given product. Standards of identity, quality, fill of container and grades are basic standards used to describe foods.

Standards of Identity

A standard of identity is essentially a recipe. It lists amounts of required and optional ingredients in a given food product. Only ingredients listed in the standard have been added, and no other foods may be marketed under the name of the standardized food. After a standard of identity is established for a food product, only the name of the food and any optional ingredients added must be listed on the label. This is why labels of some foods do not have a complete list of ingredients in order of amounts present.

Standards of Quality

Standards of quality have been set for leading varieties of canned fruits and vegetables. These

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standards establish specifications for quality factors such as tenderness, color, degree of ripeness, taste and freedom from defects.

A food which does not meet quality specifications must be labeled "Below Standard in Quality," followed by a statement showing how the product fails to meet the standard (such as "excessively broken" or "excessive peel"). Quality standards have practically eliminated sub-standard products from grocers' shelves.

Standards of Fill of Container

Standards of fill of container tell how full the container must be. Standards of fill generally require packages to contain the maximum quantity of food that can be processed and sealed in the container without damaging the food. These standards apply to products that may settle after filling and to those that consist of pieces packed in a liquid.

Buying food items by the pound or by the quart gives an assurance of the quantity purchased. Without standards of measurement understood by both buyers and sellers, no orderly marketing system could exist.

USDA Grades — A Shopping Aid

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has established official grade standards — measures of quality — for a wide variety of foods. USDA grades were designed to meet variations in quality. Producers want fair prices for the quality of their products, and processors and distributors need a quality gauge

to facilitate buying and selling. USDA standards provide a means of describing product quality in line with uniform language (grades) and of pricing foods according to their quality. Users pay a voluntary fee to cover the cost of grading services, which are operated cooperatively with state departments of agriculture. The supply percentage officially graded varies from one product to another and ranges from zero for some products to 100 percent for eggs.

Foods officially graded under USDA grading services may carry the USDA shield at the option of the packer or distributor. The availability of foods carrying the USDA grade shield varies widely in different parts of the country.

Because grade standards for each food cover the entire range of quality, the number of grades for a product is based on the product's variability. Although eight grades are used to span the range of quality for beef, only three are used for fryer chickens. Even though two or more grades exist for a product, most retail stores offer a limited number — those satisfying most shoppers. USDA Choice and Good, for example, are usually the only USDA grades of beef available to shoppers in many stores. Foods most likely to carry the USDA grade shield include beef, eggs, chicken, turkey, lamb and butter.

Grade Marks You Should Know

The shape of the grade marks is quite revealing. A round stamp with *U.S.* in it is usually an inspection stamp which means the food has been inspected for wholesomeness by federal inspectors. A shield with *USDA* in it is a grade stamp which means the food has been inspected for quality by federal graders.



Federally graded meat is identified by a stamp consisting of a shield enclosing the letters *USDA* and the appropriate grade name, such as Prime, Choice or Good. The stamping is done

with a harmless vegetable dye which usually disappears in cooking.

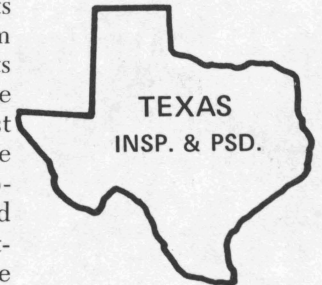
The grade gives some indication of the eating quality of the meat and can be recognized by the color, firmness, texture and marbling of the meat in relation to its age. Beef has eight grade categories; veal and calf have six grades; lamb and mutton have five grades. The three top grades for all are U.S. Prime, U.S. Choice and U.S. Good. U.S. Choice and U.S. Good are most often found in retail meat counters.

Graded meat first must be inspected for wholesomeness. The inspection mark lets you know that the meat is clean and wholesome. The grade mark gives the quality of the meat.

The Federal inspection stamp is used on fresh and cured meat sold across state lines. It assures you that the meat was produced from healthy animals in a sanitary plant. The stamp is placed only once on wholesale cuts, so it is likely to appear only on large cuts of meat.



The state stamp represents the Texas inspection system and may be used on meats which do not cross the state line. The state program must be "at least equal to" the Federal inspection program. It is administered through the Division of Veterinary Public Health of the State Department of Health.



This stamp is used on processed meat products — canned, frozen, dried or packaged. It means that the product is clean and wholesome, that the label has been approved by USDA and that it is truthful and accurate.



Federally inspected poultry has a round shield which appears on canned, frozen and fresh poultry.



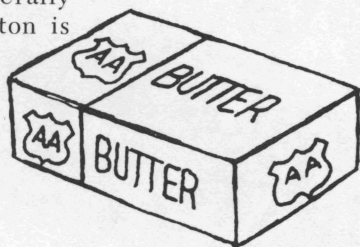
Federally graded poultry wears this shield on the label.



Cartons of eggs graded under the federal-state program have this shield. Texas egg standards are the same as USDA standards.



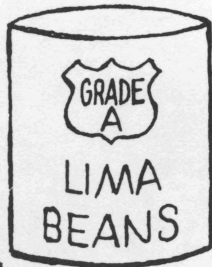
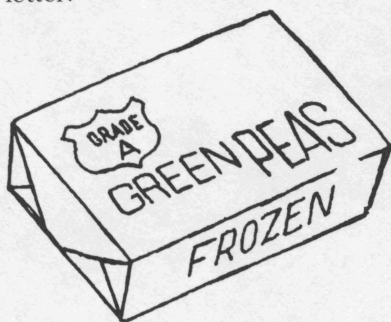
Butter is also federally graded and the carton is labeled.



Consumer grades of fruits and vegetables are designated by a shield carrying an alphabetical designation. Wholesale grades are designated by numerical listings.



Canned and frozen fruits and vegetables graded carry a shield with their grade letter.



Processed Products

When buying prepared main dishes, you do not really know what is inside the package. For example, you might expect the contents of a beef stew package to be similar to the stew you make from a recipe. This may not be true if the processor used less beef than you normally use. Knowing the amount of meat or poultry required by law in processed products can help you evaluate such products before purchasing.

Manufacturers are not required to specify the amount of each ingredient used in a product. They are required to list on the package label the ingredients in descending order of predominance by weight.

The name of the product is another clue to the amount of meat present. Read the label carefully to know whether meat or some other ingredient predominates.

The following amounts of meat or other ingredients have been established in some federally inspected products.

Beef with gravy — at least 50 percent cooked beef.

Gravy with beef — at least 35 percent cooked beef.

Frankfurters — no more than 30 percent fat.

Chili con carne — at least 40 percent meat.

Chili con carne with beans — at least 25 percent meat.

Chili sauce with meat — at least 6 percent meat.

Deviled ham — no more than 35 percent fat.

Frozen dinners — at least 25 percent cooked meat in the total meal (not including appetizers, bread or dessert).

Meat pies — at least 25 percent uncooked meat.

Hash — at least 35 percent cooked meat.

The following are red meat products with less than 25 percent meat.

Beans with frankfurters in sauce — at least 20 percent franks.

Lasagna with meat and sauce — at least 12 percent meat.

Meat ravioli — at least 10 percent uncooked meat in ravioli (not including sauce).

Pizza with sausage — at least 12 percent cooked sausage or 10 percent dry sausage (such as pepperoni).

Scalloped potatoes and ham — at least 20 percent cooked ham.

The poultry content of some poultry products is as follows.

Chicken croquettes — at least 25 percent cooked chicken meat.

Poultry chop suey — at least 4 percent cooked poultry meat.

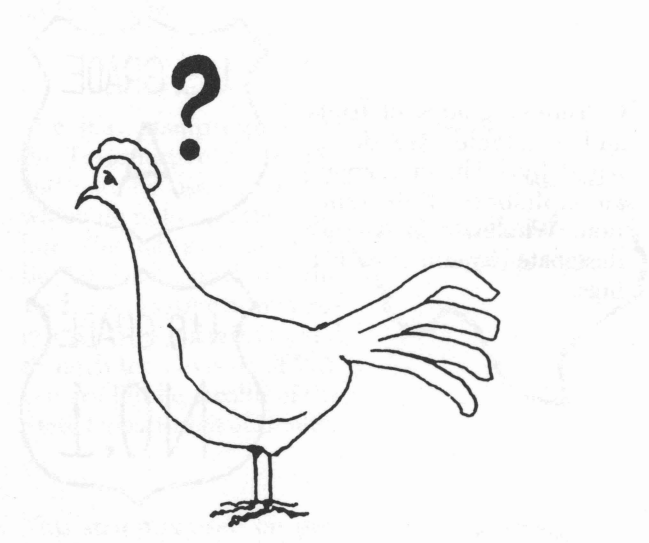
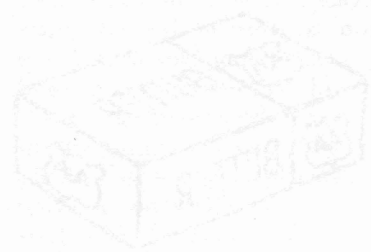
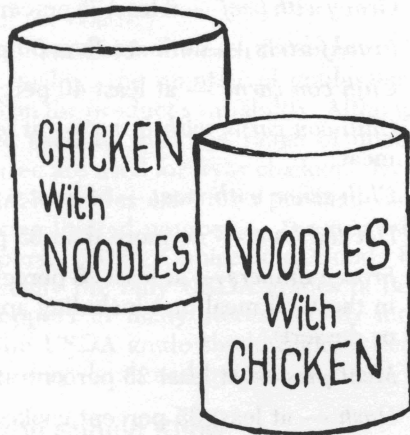
Chop suey with poultry — at least 2 percent cooked poultry meat.

Poultry noodles and dumplings — at least 15 percent cooked poultry meat or 30 percent cooked poultry meat with bone.

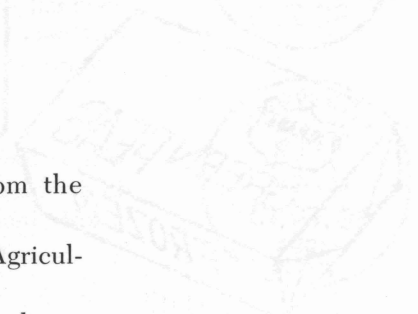
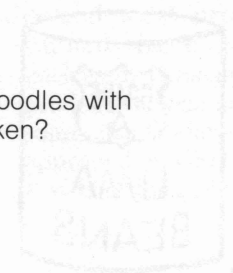
Poultry soup — at least 2 percent cooked poultry meat.

Are you buying a can of . . .

. . . more chicken than noodles



. . . or mostly noodles with a little chicken?



Additional information is available from the following sources.

Food For Us All, USDA Yearbook of Agriculture, 1969.

Shopper's Guide, USDA Yearbook of Agriculture, 1974.

Home and Garden bulletins:

- 170, Meat and Poultry — Wholesome For You.
- 171, Meat and Poultry — Standards For You.
- 172, Meat and Poultry — Labeled For You.
- 173, Meat and Poultry — Clean For You.

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