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Perishable Produce and Quality Development

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**General Requirements
Standards for Meat Carcasses and Cuts**

Transmitted by Australia

Note by the Secretariat: The general requirements were decided at the last session and adopted by the Working Party. The present document contains the newest version of the general requirements as discussed by the Meeting of Rapporteurs in Brisbane.

GE.99-33237

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

STANDARDS FOR MEAT CARCASSES AND CUTS

1.0 FOREWORD

The purpose of this standard is to define and describe commercial quality and merchandising requirements of meat carcasses and cuts moving into international trade as fit for human consumption. It is recognized that many other requirements of food standardization and veterinary control must be complied with to market meat across international borders. The standard does not attempt to prescribe those aspects which are covered elsewhere, and throughout the standard, such provisions are left to national or international legislation, or requirements of the importing country.

These general requirements for meat purchase specifications are recommended for use with the individual species-specific UN/ECE Standards for meat and meat products. For assurance that items comply with these detailed requirements, buyers may choose to enlist the services of an independent, unbiased third-party to ensure product compliance with a purchaser's specified options. The species specific standards include photographs of carcasses and selected commercial cuts to facilitate a better understanding of the provisions with a view to ensuring a wide application in international trade.

2.0 SCOPE / APPLICATION

This standard applies to Bovine, Porcine, Ovine, and Caprine carcasses and / or associated cuts marketed as fit for human consumption. The purpose of this document is to provide a variety of options to purchasers for meat handling, packing and packaging, and conformity assessment which conforms to good commercial practice for meat and meat products intended to be sold in international trade. Contractors are responsible for delivering products that comply with all contractual and specification requirements and are advised to set up a quality control system designed to assure compliance.

The standard may contain references to other international agreements, standards and codes of practice which have the objective of maintaining the quality after dispatch and of providing guidance to governments on certain aspects of food hygiene, labelling and other matters which fall outside the scope of this standard. Codex Alimentarius Commission Standards, Guidelines, and Codes of Practice should be consulted as the competent international reference concerning health and sanitation requirements.

3.0 REGULATORY REQUIREMENT

All meat and meat products will originate from animals slaughtered in establishments regularly operated under the applicable regulations pertaining to food safety and inspection.

4.0 MEAT PROCESSING / HANDLING

4.1 PROVISIONS CONCERNING REFRIGERATION

Meat may be presented chilled, frozen or deep-frozen. Ambient temperatures should be such throughout the supply chain to ensure uniform internal product temperatures as follows:

(A) **Chilled:** product maintained at not less than -1.5°C or more than $+7^{\circ}\text{C}$ at any time following the post-slaughter chilling process.

(B) **Frozen:** product maintained at not exceeding -12°C at any time after freezing.

(C) **Deep-frozen:** product maintained at not exceeding -18°C at any time after freezing.

4.2 PROVISIONS CONCERNING CONDITION OF THE MEAT

(A) Carcasses/cuts must be:

1. Intact, taking into account the presentation.
2. Free from visible blood clots, or bone dust.
3. Free from any visible foreign matter (e.g. dirt, wood, metal particles ¹).
4. Free of offensive odours.
5. Free of obtrusive bloodstains.
6. Free of unspecified protruding or broken bones.
7. Free of contusions. ²
8. Free from freezerburn. ³

¹ When specified by the purchaser, meat items will be subject to metal particle detection.

² Contusions having a material impact on any product are not permitted.

³ Freezer-burn is localized or widespread areas of irreversible surface dehydration indicated, in part or all, by changes from original colour (usually paler), flavour (flavourless), smell (rancid), and / or tactile properties (dry, spongy).

Cutting, trimming, and boning of cuts shall be accomplished with sufficient care to maintain cut integrity and identity, and avoid scores in the lean. Ragged edges shall be removed close to the lean surfaces. Except for cuts that are separated through natural seams, all cross-sectional surfaces shall form approximate right angles with the skin surface. Minimal amounts of lean, fat, or bone shall be included on a cut from an adjacent cut. For boneless cuts, all bones, cartilage, and surface lymph glands shall be removed.

4.3 PROVISIONS FOR FAT LIMITATIONS AND EVALUATING FAT THICKNESS IN CERTAIN CUTS

The purchaser can specify the maximum fat thickness of carcasses, sides and cuts. Allowable fat limitations are as follows:

Pealed Denuded, Surface Membrane Removed

Pealed Denuded

Practically Free of Fat (75% Lean surface exposed)

Nominated Maximum fat thickness in mm.

Specified Chemical Lean (ie Trimmings)

Trimming of external fat shall be accomplished by smooth removal along the contour of underlying muscle surfaces. Bevelled fat edges alone do not substitute for complete trimming of external surfaces when required. Fat thickness requirements may apply to surface fat (subcutaneous and / or exterior fat in relation to the item), and seam (intermuscular) fat as specified by the purchaser. Two definitions are used to describe fat trim limitations:

1. Maximum fat thickness at any one point. Evaluated by visually determining the area of a cut which has the greatest fat depth, and measuring the thickness of the fat at that point.
Average (mean) fat thickness. Evaluated by visually determining and taking multiple measurements of the fat depth of areas where surface fat is evident only. Average fat depth is determined by computing the mean depth in those areas.

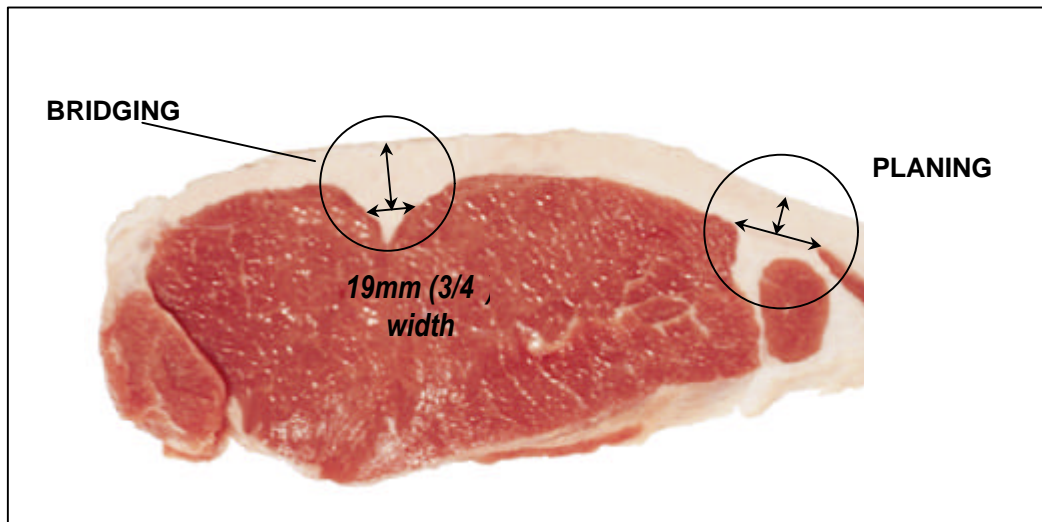


Figure 1

Actual measurements of fat thickness (depth) are made on the edges of cuts by probing or scoring the overlying surface fat in a manner that reveals the actual thickness and accounts for any natural depression or seam which could affect the measurement. When a natural depression occurs in a muscle, only the fat above the portion of the depression which is more than 19 mm/ 3/4" in width is considered (known as bridging; See Figure 1). When a seam of fat occurs between adjacent muscles, only the fat above the level of the involved muscles is measured (known as planing; See Figure 1).

However, when fat limitations for Peeled/Denuded⁴ or Peeled/Denuded, Surface Membrane Removed⁵ are specified, the bridging method shall be used for evaluating fat above a natural depression in a muscle and fat occurring between adjacent muscles.

⁴ Peeled/Denuded - The term "Peeled" implies surface fat and muscle separation through natural seams so that the resulting cut's seamed surface ("silver" or "blue tissue") is exposed with remaining "flake" fat not to exceed 1.0 inch (2.5cm) in the longest dimension and/or 0.125 inch (3mm) in depth at any point. The term "denuded" implies all surface fat is removed so that the resulting cuts seamed surface ("silver" or "blue tissue") is exposed with remaining "flake" fat not to exceed 1.0 inch (2.5cm) in any dimension and/or 0.125 inch (3mm) in depth at any point.

⁵ Peeled/Denuded, Surface Membrane Removed - When the surface membrane ("silver" or "blue tissue") is required to be removed (skinned), the resulting cut surface shall expose at least 90 percent lean with remaining "flake" fat not to exceed 0.125 inch (3mm) in depth.

4.4 PROVISIONS CONCERNING MEAT AND FAT COLOUR AND pH

Normally, lean meat and fat, depending on the specific species, demonstrate a characteristic colour and pH. Specific provisions concerning the evaluation of lean and fat color, and pH are contained within the species specific standards.

4.5 PROVISIONS CONCERNING ORIGIN AND PRODUCTION HISTORY

These provisions are optional, however, the purchaser can require the seller to provide proof (see paragraph 4.8) of documentary procedures for validation purposes. Information under the following three headings is included in the species-specific standards.

1. Production Systems
2. Feeding Systems

Animal Identification

4.6 PROVISIONS CONCERNING PACKING, STORAGE, AND TRANSPORT

The packaging (or prepacking) is the primary covering of a product and must be of food grade materials. The packing is the secondary covering containing the packaged products. During the storage and transport, the meat must be packaged to the following minimum requirements:

(A) Carcasses and quarters

1. Chilled with or without packaging
2. Frozen / deep frozen packed to protect the products

(B) Cuts

1. Chilled
 - a. I.W.P. (Individually wrapped)
 - b. Bulk packaged (plastic or wax-lined container)
 - c. Vacuum-packed (VP)
 - d. Modified atmosphere packaging (MAP)
 - e. Other
2. Frozen / deep frozen
 - a. I.W.P.
 - b. Bulk packaged (plastic or wax-lined container)
 - c. Vacuum-packed
 - d. Other

modified atmosphere, frozen, or deep-frozen) and shall be in accordance with the requirements of the importing country. Attention is drawn to the provisions of the Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be Used for Such Carriage (ATP).

4.7 LABELLING INFORMATION TO BE MENTIONED ON OR FIXED TO THE MARKETING UNITS OF MEAT

Without prejudice to national requirements of the importing countries, the following table contains information that must be listed on product labels, as designated by an "x", for unpackaged carcasses, quarters, and cuts, and for packaged or packed meat items.

LABELLING INFORMATION	UNPACKAGED CARCASSES, QUARTERS AND CUTS	PACKAGED OR PACKED MEAT
Health stamp	X	X
Slaughter number or batch number	X	X
Slaughter date	X	
Packaging date		X
Name of the product		X
Use-by information as required by each country		X
Storage methods: chilled, frozen, deep-frozen		X
Storage conditions		X
Details of packer or retailer		X ⁶
Quantity (number of pieces)		X
Net weight		X

There are also several other production, processing and quality factors that may need to be listed on the product label or associated documentation, amongst which are:

- ◆ pH, lean and fat colour
- ◆ production and processing systems
- ◆ classification / grading
- ◆ slaughtering procedures

characteristics of the livestock, production and feeding systems⁷
Where appropriate details of these factors can be found in the species specific sections.

⁶ This information can also be provided in accompanying documentation.

⁷ To communication on these elements appropriate systems of traceability will be described in annexes to the species specific standards.

4.8 AUTHORITY FOR CONFORMITY ASSESSMENT

In addition to detailed product descriptions, this standard includes an option for purchasers to voluntarily select a conformity assessment authority within each contract. Conformity assessment authorities voluntarily selected by purchasers will apply and / or assign merchandising criteria and assist with resolution of claims in contractual disputes.

Each conformity assessment authority listed, if selected voluntarily in a contractual agreement, will be wholly responsible for third party assessment of compliance with the standards detailed herein, based on that authorities operating methodology. Additionally, voluntarily selected authorities can determine characteristics to be utilized for merchandising criteria on the part of the purchaser based on standards and methodology specific to that authority under secondary lists of merchandising options, contained in this document, that are related to palatability, yields, or other quality / value related characteristics of the product.

If dispute resolution is considered important between trading partners and is addressed and included as part of the contractual language between traders, purchasing entities first can voluntarily select a conformity assessment authority that will have the final responsibility for determining compliance of a product with the contractual agreement based on the standards contained herein, inclusive of any additional requirements specified in the contract. Conformity assessment for compliance can voluntarily be mandated at the point of origin, prior to shipping, or can be obtained strictly on an "as-needed" basis to resolve a contractual dispute. When a claim is filed against a supplier, the parties should be obligated to comply with the findings of their voluntarily selected third party conformity assessment authority if such an authority is designated at the time of contract initiation.

If an authority for determining compliance is voluntarily selected by the purchasing entity, that purchasing entity also will have access to additional services or procedures provided by that specific authority, e.g., carcass classification and certification services, quality systems certification services, etc.

Suppliers in some nations may be required to submit product or management systems for certification based on the laws and regulations of their country. Such mechanisms for conformity assessment should be selected by the purchasing entity in the contractual language as the authority option for binding conformity assessment.

4.8.1 Use of Logo - Certification Requirements

The UN / ECE logo is a trademark of UN / ECE and must not be used without the written permission of UN / ECE through an Accredited Certifying Authority.⁸ Permission will only be granted on such terms and conditions as UN /ECE determines from time to time.

For the purposes of these Standards, certification means a certificate awarded to an enterprise which has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of an Accredited Certifying Authority, compliance with these Standards and any other certification requirements as published from time to time.

Each certified enterprise must establish and maintain a quality management system approved by an Accredited Certifying Authority. The minimum acceptable standard of quality management system is alignment with the relevant equivalent elements of the ISO 9002:1994 Standard for Supplier Quality Systems, as applicable to maintenance of integrity of the requirements of these Standards.

Each certified enterprise must at all times demonstrate to the satisfaction of an Accredited Certifying Authority that there are at all times sufficient trained staff to accurately apply these Standards.

Other descriptions and markings (including enterprise brands used on carcasses, carcass tickets, carton labels and other wraps) must not conflict or be likely to be confused with these Standards.

4.9 EAN•UCC CODIFICATION SYSTEM

The EAN•UCC System is utilized in these standards as the recommended standard codification system to enhance the communication between buyers and sellers and third party conformity assessment entities. It is an identification and communication system standardized for use across international borders, which is managed by EAN International, together with national EAN coding authorities around the world, and by the Uniform Code Council (UCC) in the USA and Canada. The system is designed to overcome the limitations of using company, industry or country specific coding systems and to make trading much more efficient and responsive to customers.

⁸ An Accredited Certifying Authority means a body listed at Annex ? which is:

- (a) accredited by UN / ECE to certify enterprise quality management systems and
- (b) approved by UN / ECE to conduct audits of certified enterprises in accordance with these Standards

The use of the EAN•UCC System improves the efficiency and accuracy of international trade and product distribution by unambiguously identifying goods, services and locations.

It is also used in electronic data interchange (EDI). EAN/UCC codes can be represented by data carriers (bar code symbols) to enable their electronic reading wherever required in the trading process. As well as providing unique identification, this system also allows for additional information, such as the UN/ECE meat carcasses and cuts standards, best before dates, weight, batch and serial numbers to be shown in bar coded format.

The codes utilized to describe meat carcasses and cuts are presented within the species-specific UN/ECE standards. They are coded in the form of identification numbers, which are represented by means of an EAN/UCC Application Identifier in the UCC/EAN -128 standard. An EAN/UCC Application Identifier is a prefix used to identify the meaning and format of the data that follows it. It is an open standard, which can be used and understood by all companies in the trading chain, regardless of the company that originally issued the codes.

Use of UCC/EAN -128 standard is recommended to enhance the communication between buyers and sellers, and third party conformity assessment entities.

Example: (01) 91234567890121 (3102) 000076 (240) 97845863215987458 (15)
19990801
(10) 000831
(01) Global Trade Item Number (GTIN)
(3102) Net Weight, kilograms
(240) UN/ECE Standard code
(15) Use by date
(10) Batch number

Information relevant to the application of the EAN•UCC System can be found in the species specific sections.

Example Only

