

## ***All Natural, Pasture Fed, Grassfed and Cloned Beef Labels***

With the increased interest by consumers in more nutritious beef, the USDA (Department of Agriculture) decided to define (dictate) the minimum standards of just what is required by ranchers/producers of beef to qualify for certain beef labels. Our local Texas Grassfed Livestock Alliance, our national American Grassfed Association and several other all-grass associations lobbied very hard with our USDA beef labeling committee to seize upon this opportunity to “narrowly define” exact protocols and standards so consumers would know exactly what they are eating. Of course, the big meat packers and feedlot owners also lobbied very hard for a very “broadly defined” set of protocols and minimum standards. We lost and they won the lobbying war.

So, beware! Here are the standards the USDA now believes properly informs consumers as they shop for beef.

1. **All Natural**—as popularized by Nolan Ryan’s Tender-Aged All Natural Beef: Nolan Ryan owns no fewer than four mega-large “feedlots” in Texas. Foreman’s Choice is jumping on this bandwagon also. Now, according to the USDA, All Natural means producers can give Growth Hormones (steroid implants and growth promoters), high-dosage quantities of Antibiotics (when feedlot animals are sick), and low-dosage quantities of Antibiotic feeds (medicated feeds) with the grain-based feeds used in feedlots. FYI, 70% of worldwide antibiotic consumption is in U.S. feedlots. NOW, the only requirement mandated by the USDA is that for the LAST 90 DAYS before slaughter, producers cannot administer these items to the animals. An animal is slaughtered between 12-24 months of age. Three months (90 days) out of 12-24 months allows producers a lot of time to implant and medicate their animals. The USDA believes all the effects of Hormones and Antibiotics have left the meat tissue after 90 days. These animals can be finished in the feedlot and never have access to grass their entire lives and they still qualify as **ALL NATURAL**. Give me a break; All Natural? Go figure! Big lobbies have big money!
2. **Pasture Finished**—means a producer can feed his animals a “grain-based diet” as long as animals have access to pasture. The problem is that the USDA is allowing feedlots to open a gate from their feedlots into an adjacent “small” pasture to qualify as Pasture Finished. This is funny and sick at the same time. Feedlots manage thousands of head per day on a limited number of acres; i.e., 10-500 acres. Most ranchers run 1 cow per 5 to 40 acres to ensure that one animal has adequate grass to graze. So, a feedlot with 10,000 head would need 400,000 acres to adequately provide for those animals. 450,000 acres is half the size of the average Texas County. 450,000 acres is 30 miles long and 15 miles wide. Unfortunately, cattle are similar to humans. They prefer sweet foods like grain and corn to grass. They will spend the majority of their time at the feed trough and a minority of time eating grass...if there is grass to eat. Fortunately, this requirement should provide a better housing and health environment for those animals but it will not improve the nutrition of their meat. The original intent, of most of us small producers using the term Pasture Finished, was to define Pasture Finished to help consumers understand that cattle do not eat just grass. While in a pasture, they eat a lot of different

green forages: forbs, weeds, tree leaves, etc. But, it needs to be “green”. So, Holy Cow Beef is replacing all of its Pasture-Raised/Pasture-Finished language with Grass-Raised/Grass-Finished.

3. **Grassfed**—according to the USDA, means an animal must have “access” to grass and pasture during its life, and the animals must get the majority of its nutrients from grass. The USDA does not define how much time or at what age these animals have this “access” to grass or pasture. Nor will the USDA monitor ranches/feedlots 24/7 to verify how much time an animal spends eating grass vs. grains from feed troughs. So, once again, big beef industry will open a gate from their feedlots to an adjacent pasture to qualify as Grassfed. Now, even more horrific, the USDA is allowing producers to implant animals with Growth Hormones and to doctor with Antibiotics and to feed medicated feeds and still qualify as Grassfed. The USDA’s position is that the use of hormones and antibiotics has nothing **“literally”** to do with the **“concept”** of grassfed. We, little guys, all argued (in person before the head of the USDA’s labeling committee) that the average consumer would be EXTREMELY CONFUSED by this labeling. The **“SPIRIT”** of the Grassfed movement is to provide consumers with a healthier choice...who cares what is meant by “literally vs. figuratively”. All I can say is that the big-beef industry easily won this labeling battle, and American consumers will be very confused by it.
  
4. **Cloning**—the USDA recently ruled that meat from cloned animals was safe for human consumption. This means that the beef (all meats) you buy from your supermarket **will not** carry a label distinguishing that one cut was produced from a cloned animal while another cut was produced naturally. This means you will never know where and how your beef was produced. I’m sorry, but that is just not good enough for me. I believe in eating only products that can reproduce themselves. Cloned animals are infertile and cannot reproduce.