

**“DECODING” THE ALPHABET SOUP OF ANIMAL I.D.  
AND MARKETING PROGRAMS**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Wow! What a difference two years makes. At the Range Beef Cow Symposium in 2003, we endeavored to address the topic “Traceback, Verification, and Animal Identification on the Ranch: Big Brother of Best Buddy?” On the very day of this presentation, December 9, 2005, a Holstein cow in the state of Washington was harvested and due to abnormalities observed in this cow, tissue samples were taken for further evaluation. Later that month, on December 23, 2003, it was announced that this cow tested positive for bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). This event, along with associated policy from USDA, combined to rocket the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) forward. Correspondingly, programs have developed in the beef sector designed to verify, assure, and differentiate animals and products in the marketplace.

The purpose of this paper is not to reiterate all of the ramifications, producer attitudes or consumer feedback on the merits or challenges associated with is topic. Rather, it is our objective to simply “decode” the alphabet soup used in this arena. It is our supposition, that many cattle producers, academics and allied industry folks involved in the business lack understanding of many of the terms, programs, and purposes of certain acronyms that are being freely thrown around today.

**DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS**

In the 2003 Range Beef Cow Symposium paper (Whittier, 2003), a few definitions were given, and we think some of them bear repeating at this point in order to set the stage for a discussion of additional items:

**Traceability** – The concept or practice that requires or encourages the implementation of 'best practice' tracking systems.

**Source Verification** - The ability to trace products from their initial components (for example, from the ranch) through a production and distribution system to the end user.

**Process Verification** –The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) and Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) have developed voluntary testing and process verification programs in response to the market's growing need to facilitate the marketing of agricultural products.  
(<http://www.ams.usda.gov/process/amsprocesses.htm>)

**Animal Identification** – The process of designating animals with an identifier (e.g. eartag, brand, back-tag, marking) or a biomarker (e.g. retinal vascular pattern) that allows recognition and classification. Animal identification facilitates traceback, verification and management procedures.

**USAIP** – (<http://usaip.info/>) United States Animal Identification Plan. A proposed national plan to identify livestock premises, lots, groups and individuals. This plan was the predecessor to the current National Animal Identification System or NAIS.

### WHO'S WHO AND WHAT'S WHAT?

Umberger and Loureiro (2003) reported that when consumers were asked who they trust to certify producers, consumers overwhelmingly listed the government (i.e. USDA, FSIS and related agencies) as the major entity for this purpose (Figure 1). Given this response from consumers, it seems appropriate that many of the programs and policies used by the beef industry are established within USDA. Below is a list and brief description of agencies within USDA that deal such programs. More information can be found at [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

USDA Agencies (source: [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov) )

#### **Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)**

AMS facilitates the strategic marketing of agricultural products in domestic and international markets while ensuring fair trading practices and promoting a competitive and efficient marketplace. AMS constantly works to develop new marketing services to increase customer satisfaction.

#### **Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)**

APHIS protects and promotes agricultural health by administering the Animal Welfare Act and carrying out wildlife damage management activities.

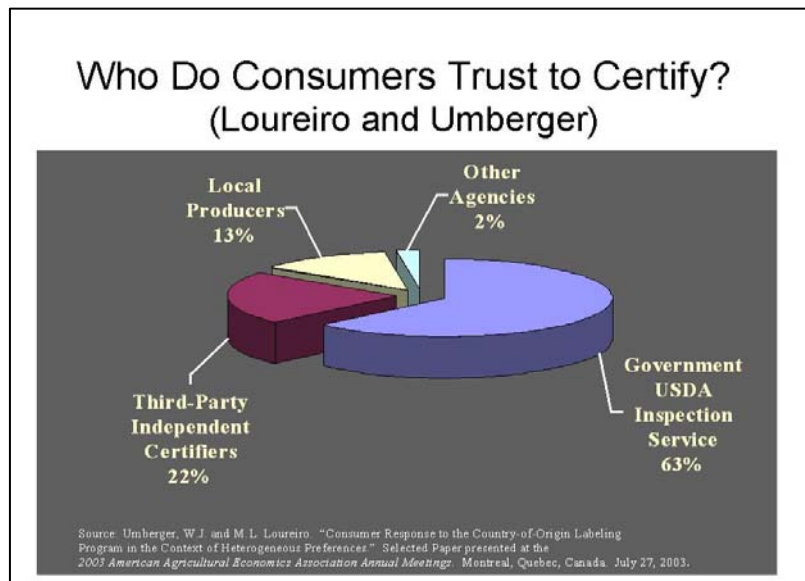


Figure 1. When surveyed, consumers reported a high level of trust in USDA as an entity they trust to certify safety of food products.

### **Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP)**

CNPP works to improve the health and well-being of Americans by developing and promoting dietary guidance that links scientific research to the nutrition needs of consumers.

Center staff help to define and coordinate nutrition education policy within USDA and to translate nutrition research into information and materials for consumers, policymakers, and professionals in health, education, industry, and media.

### **Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)**

FSIS enhances public health and well-being by protecting the public from foodborne illness and ensuring that the nation's meat, poultry and egg products are safe, wholesome, and correctly packaged.

### **Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)**

GIPSA facilitates the marketing of livestock, poultry, meat, cereals, oilseeds, and related agricultural products. It also promotes fair and competitive trading practices for the overall benefit of consumers and American agriculture. GIPSA ensures open and competitive markets for livestock, poultry, and meat by investigating and monitoring industry trade practices.

## **SPECIFIC MARKETING/VERIFICATION/CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS RELATED TO BEEF CATTLE**

### **Programs Administered by USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)**

#### **USDA Export Verification (EV) Program (Beef, Bovine, and Ovine)**

*(Source: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/arc/bev.htm>)*

The Audit, Review, and Compliance (ARC) Branch has been assigned responsibility for reviewing and approving companies as eligible suppliers of meat and meat products according to USDA Export Verification (EV) Programs.

ARC Branch personnel conduct regular audits of participating suppliers according to the applicable ARC Procedure. Suppliers must request eligibility under an approved Quality System Assessment (QSA) Program.

Eligible suppliers are included in the applicable Internet publication listed on their website. Only eligible suppliers listed in the Official Listing may supply product identified as meeting the requirements of the applicable USDA EV Program. Products produced using an approved Program are eligible to be issued a Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) Export certificate which includes the applicable statement as listed in the FSIS Library of Export Requirements.

## **The USDA Quality System Assessment (QSA) Program**

(Source: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/arc/qsap.htm>)

The USDA Quality System Assessment (QSA) Program provides suppliers of agricultural products and services the opportunity to assure customers of their ability to provide consistent quality products or services. It is limited to programs or portions of programs where specified product requirements are supported by a documented quality management system. The specified product requirements may be identified by the supplier or by another ARC Branch Program. The documented quality management system is verified through independent, third party audits conducted by the ARC Branch.

To operate an approved QSA Program, a supplier must submit a documented quality management system that meets the requirements of ARC 1002 Procedure. The program must successfully pass a document review and an on-site audit in accordance to ARC 1000 Procedure.

## **Programs Administered by Animal Plant Health**

(Source: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>)

**Veterinary Services (VS)** protects and improves the health, quality, and marketability of our nation's animals, animal products and veterinary biologics by preventing, controlling and/or eliminating animal diseases, and monitoring and promoting animal health and productivity.

**Animal Care (AC)** provides leadership for determining standards of humane care and treatment of animals. AC implements those standards and achieves compliance through inspection, education, and cooperative efforts.

## **Programs Administered by Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS)**

(Source: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>)

### **HAACP and Pathogen Reduction**

The implementation of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) and FSIS' laboratory testing programs are two areas that help ensure the safety of the meat, poultry, and egg products supply.

## **Programs Administered by Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA)**

(Source: <http://www.gipsa.usda.gov/>)

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) facilitates the marketing of livestock, poultry, meat, cereals, oilseeds, and related agricultural products, and promotes fair and competitive trading practices for the overall benefit of consumers and American agriculture.

GIPSA is part of USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs, which are working to ensure a productive and competitive global marketplace for U.S. agricultural products.

GIPSA's **Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS)** establishes the Official Standards for Grain, which are used each and every day by sellers and buyers to communicate the type and quality of grain bought and sold. FGIS also establishes standard testing methodologies to accurately and consistently measure grain quality. Finally, the program provides for the impartial application of these grades and standards through a network of Federal, State, and private inspection agencies known as the official system.

The Agency's **Packers and Stockyards Programs (P&S)** ensure open and competitive markets for livestock, meat, and poultry. P&S is a regulatory program whose roots are in providing financial protection, and ensuring fair and competitive markets. As an impartial, third-party entity, GIPSA helps ensure a fair and competitive marketing system for all involved in the merchandising of grain and related products, livestock, meat, and poultry.

## SUMMARY

This brief overview of programs and agencies involved in certification, verification and description of beef products is intended to provide producers with a reference for better understanding the marketing environment that exists in today's industry. In addition to those listed above, private companies have developed their own descriptions and criterion for marketing beef.

## REFERENCES

- Umberger, W.J. and M.L.Loureiro. 2003. Consumer Responses to the Country-of-Origin Labeling Program in the Context of Heterogeneous Preferences. Selected Paper presented at the 2003 American Agricultural Economics Association Annual Meetings. Montreal, Quebec, Canada. July 27, 2003.
- Whittier, J.C. 2003. Traceback, Verification and Animal Identification On The Ranch: "Big Brother Or Best Buddy?" Proceedings, The Range Beef Cow Symposium XVIII, December 9, 10, and 11, 2003, Mitchell, Nebraska p. 5-14.

