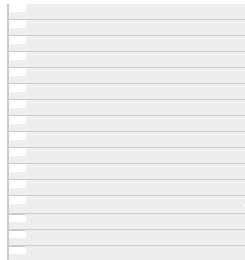


Grass-fed beef producers approve new labeling standard

Food Alliance may start inspections under new grass-fed standard by May

by *Sustainable Food News*
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The American Grassfed Association (AGA) said Wednesday its board has voted to start certifying grass-fed meat operations under a new industry-backed standard administered by Food Alliance, owner one of the most comprehensive agricultural eco-labels in North America.

“We can now begin the process of developing the audit protocols that will allow our members to certify their farms and ranches as grassfed,” AGA Beef Director Will Harris told **Sustainable Food News**.

The AGA represents more than 300 grassfed livestock producers. FA certifies farms, ranches, food processors and distributors for sustainable agriculture certification, which addresses labor conditions, humane animal care, and environmental stewardship.

Certified businesses can use the green, FA eco-label on its products to show off social and environmental responsibility.

FA Executive Director Scott Exo told **SFN** earlier that it could his group could start taking applications and undertaking inspections of producers wishing to be AGA-certified by May.

AGA’s grass-fed marketing claim standard is intended to exceed the requirements for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s grass-fed standard announced in October, which allows animals confined to feedlots, given antibiotics and growth hormones to still be labeled ‘grass-fed’ as long as they were fed a forage diet.

The AGA standards, on the other hand, are primarily based on four precepts: total forage diet, no confinement, no antibiotics and no added hormones. The AGA grass-fed claim applies to ruminants only – cattle, sheep and eventually goats – not poultry or pork.

And since producers seeking FA certification are already assessed against rigorous animal welfare standards including no hormones or non-therapeutic antibiotics, Exo said those passing certification under the specific AGA grass-fed standards will be able to market products with both FA and the AGA’s American Grass Fed seals.

“[Producers] will be getting a twofer,” he said.

Grass-fed meat producers have waited for years for the department to develop certification standards and procedures, like the organic certification and seal, to distinguish grass-fed animals from conventionally raised

animals.

And though the USDA did ban the use of antibiotics and growth hormones in its 'naturally raised' marketing claim standard it released in December, it still leaves out the issue of confinement.

The comment period for the proposed voluntary standard for a naturally-raised marketing claim for livestock and meat was recently extended to March 3.

Still, Exo said splitting sustainable agriculture practices into separate marketing claims can be especially frustrating for producers.

"The problem with slicing things so thinly is that a producer has to put words all over packaging to get his marketing message across," he said.

Exo said with both Food Alliance and AGA grass-fed certification producers are able to have a host of practices assessed to standards that consumers are calling for; all in one certification process and indicated by the FA and AGA seals.

"That is the kind of simplification that the marketplace is looking for," he said.