

Canadian Beef Labelling Fact Sheet

Buying Canadian Beef

A lot of beef is imported into Canada every year – \$455 million in 2002 alone! Competition is a good thing. However, there have been situations reported where imported beef is misrepresented as Canadian. To be an informed buyer, you need to know what to look for and what to do if you suspect fraud. Remember, knowledge is your best defence.

Make sure you understand labelling requirements.

Product of Canada

The words “Product of Canada” stamped on the box does not mean the product in the box is from Canada – it simply means that the beef has undergone some form of processing in Canada. The product in the box may be Canadian but it could also be imported beef that has been “reworked” (i.e. undergone trimming or portioning) in Canada.

Canadian Federal or Provincial Inspection Stamp

The Canadian Federal or Provincial Inspection stamp on the label or box doesn't mean the beef inside is Canadian – it just means that the product has been inspected and approved at a Canadian plant as meeting a standard set of health and safety guidelines under the supervision of the CFIA. The stamp will also have a number listed on the bottom that refers to the plant at which the product was processed. For a list of establishments and their associated numbers, go to the CFIA website at: www.inspection.gc.ca.



from industry, sets the grade standards. Only Canadian beef that has been processed in a federally or provincially inspected facility can be assigned a Canadian grade name by the CGBA. Grading is not mandatory.

One sure way to know that your beef is Canadian is to ensure the official **Canada Grade Name** is clearly printed on the label. To be “official” the Canada Grade name must be noted as follows; it must be shown in these words with or without the maple leaf:



CANADA AAA OR HIGHER
CANADA AAA



CANADA A OR HIGHER
CANADA A



CANADA AA OR HIGHER
CANADA AA



CANADA PRIME

If you want to be sure the beef you buy is Canadian, what do you look for?

Look for the the Canadian Grade.

The Canadian Grading System

The Canadian Beef Grading Agency (CBGA) is a private, non-profit corporation. They have been accredited by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to deliver grading services for beef in Canada. The Federal Government, based on recommendations

These grade labels refer to Canada's top grades, which have minimum marbling requirements, and set characteristics for maturity, muscling, meat and fat colour and texture.

Any variation on these names as listed above is not allowed. For example “Angus AA,” “Canadian A,” “AAA,” “Certified A or higher,” “Premium AAA,” “Mucky Lake Top Quality AAA Beef” are not allowable grade designations. Remember that the colour of an animal's hide, or designation of a special name or program, is not a grade. If you find mislabelled product, question the supplier and report the suspected misrepresentation to the CBGA.



Questions and Answers



Q. “The box I have doesn’t say anything about a grade – now what do I look for?”

Any products not marked with a Canada Grade name must be labelled “UNGRADED” or bear the *grade designation* of the country of origin (there is no requirement for the name of the country of origin to appear). This applies for all beef products down to an individual piece size of 125 cm³ (5 cm x 5 cm x 5 cm or 2” x 2” x 2”) and would include most portion controlled steak products. If the label doesn’t give an official Canada grade name or the grade designation from the country of origin or the word “Ungraded,” it is not properly labelled. Make sure you question your supplier. If the box you have does not comply with the regulations it should be identified to the Canadian Beef Grading Agency (see below for contact information).

Q. “There’s a bunch of information on the box written in felt pen. Is this ok?”

According to section 7.12 of the Meat Hygiene Manual only the weight may be hand written on a label or box. All other information must be pre-printed or applied to a shipping container by means of a printed pressure-sensitive label or applied by on-line printing. Handwritten descriptions, including grade designations are not acceptable. If any required information is not presented as noted above, question the supplier.

Q. “The printing on my box says “Canada AA or higher,” does this mean I am getting AAA beef in my carton?”

You should be aware that although the carton might be labelled “Canada Grade AA or higher,” it does not guarantee there is higher-grade product in the carton, only that there may be higher-grade product included. Do not assume that you are getting a higher quality product than you paid for.

Q. “I buy my beef from a local commercial butcher – some of their product isn’t labelled at all. What should I do?”

Currently commercial butchers – those companies operating with city or municipal food handling permits and not provincially or federally inspected – are not required to use the same labelling practises as provincially or federally inspected facilities. It is recommended that all beef be purchased from approved sources. Ask your supplier about their food safety and labelling practises.

Q. “Why do I have to be so vigilant? Isn’t someone in government responsible for ensuring all the meat I buy is properly labelled, no matter who I buy it from?”

The industry is structured in such a way that there is no ongoing monitoring of boxed beef products, with the exception of establishments where grading services are provided. The industry must be self policed and buyers must take responsibility to insist on label accuracy in a “buyer beware” approach. It is important to know what questions to ask and what to look for to ensure the products you buy for your guests is the quality you want. Ask your supplier about the grade of beef you purchase.

Q. “I am not buying a full box of product so I will not see any original box labels. How do I know what I am getting?”

Unfortunately there is no requirement at this time to put the grade label on each vacuumed package of product. It is important that you ask for written verification from your supplier as to grade, country of origin, whether the product has been previously frozen and other pertinent details such as trim level.

Q. “There’s a lot of liquid in the vacuum bag of beef I received – is this normal?”

Occasionally, previously frozen beef is misrepresented as fresh. Customers who have ordered and are paying for fresh product want to make sure that is what they are getting. If there is an unusual amount of liquid (purge) in the vacuum bag, confirm with your supplier that the product has not been previously frozen and that it has been delivered under proper conditions (i.e. a refrigerated truck).

www.beefinfo.org/foodservice

For more information on Canadian Beef Grading Standards:

Visit the Canadian Beef Grading Agency website at www.telusplanet.net/public/cbga2 and follow the links to Grading.

OR – visit the Beef Information Centre website at www.beefinfo.org and follow the links to Foodservice / Beef Cuts / Grading.

A copy of the fact sheet entitled “Canadian Beef Grading (for Foodservice)” is also available for downloading free of charge from the Beef Information Centre website by following the links to Resource Order Centre / Foodservice Resources.

To lodge a confidential complaint on a suspected case of misrepresentation of Canadian beef please contact the Canadian Beef Grading Agency (contact information following). All reports are kept confidential by CBGA. You will not be identified to the supplier when CBGA investigates.

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Mississauga Ontario L5N 2X7
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Calgary Alberta T2E 7H7
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