

Meat Grading = Taste and Tenderness

Meat grading is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Beef quality grades indicate palatability characteristics such as tenderness, juiciness and flavor. There are eight quality grades for beef which reflect the amount of marbling (fat within the lean), firmness, color and texture of the beef, and the maturity of the animal.

Grading is optional and paid for by meat processors. More than half of the beef available is graded.

Generally, only three grades are identified and sold to restaurants and at retail:



Prime has the most marbling. It usually is sold to restaurants, although some specialty meat markets and supermarkets may carry it.



Choice cuts tend to have a little less marbling. Choice is the most widely available grade in the market.



Select has the least amount of marbling, making it leaner but often less juicy and flavorful than the other two grades.