

Poultrymeat Quality Guide

This guide is dedicated to the memory of Sue Tucker, Poultry Team Leader at ADAS in Gleadthorpe from 1982 to September 1998, who produced the bulk of the draft guide but passed away before its completion.

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About this guide

This booklet provides guidance on the grading aspects of the European Communities (EC) Marketing Standards for Poultrymeat (hereafter referred to as the Regulations) namely:

- Council Regulation 1906/90, as amended; and
- Commission Regulation 1538/91, as amended.

The purpose of the Regulations is to facilitate harmonised marketing standards throughout the EC for fresh, frozen and quick-frozen poultrymeat for human consumption. This booklet should be read in conjunction with the above Regulations.

This booklet is not an authoritative statement of law and should not be taken as a substitute for knowledge of the Regulations themselves. In the case of disputes it will ultimately be for the Courts to adjudicate.

Contact

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Enforcement

At the time of writing the powers and penalties for the authorities to enforce the Regulations have not been put in place. However, the Regulations are directly applicable and it has been decided to introduce the guidance early in order to allow all interested parties to adapt to the forthcoming regime. Further details can be obtained from the contact listed above.

Grading

The photographs in this booklet concentrate on the requirements for Class A chickens and other domestic fowl, turkeys, ducks and cuts thereof, and products not considered suitable for marketing as fresh, frozen or quick-frozen meat (known as grading failures).

Faults shown are generally appropriate for all species covered by the regulations including geese and guinea fowl, which are not specifically covered in this booklet. However, some faults may be specific to a particular species, and these have been illustrated wherever possible.

Poultrymeat shall be marketed in one of the following conditions:

- fresh,
- frozen, or
- quick frozen.

Fresh poultrymeat

This is defined as poultrymeat not stiffened by the cooling process, which is to be kept at a temperature not below -2°C and not higher than 4°C at any time. Different temperature requirements may be set for certain retail premises. Further details can be obtained from the contact point at the front of this guide.

Frozen poultrymeat

This is defined as poultrymeat which must be frozen as soon as possible within the constraints of normal slaughtering procedures and kept at a temperature no higher than -12°C at any time. The temperature must be stable and maintained, at all points in the product, at -12°C or lower, with possibly brief upward fluctuations of no more than 3°C. These tolerances in the temperature of the product shall be permitted in accordance with good storage and distribution practice during local distribution and in retail display cabinets.

Quick-frozen poultrymeat

This is defined as poultrymeat kept at a temperature no higher than -18°C at any time within the tolerances as provided for in Council Directive 89/108/EEC of 21 December relating to quick-frozen foodstuffs for human consumption.

Different faults and the effect on the grade or class of the respective product are shown for:-

- Whole carcase
- Breast
- Back
- Legs
- Wings

Definition of Classes A and B

Poultry cuts and carcasses can be graded as either A or B, according to

* freezer burn (in the sense of a reduction in quality) is the local irreversible drying up of skin and/or flesh which may show itself as changes:

- in colour (usually paler)
- in smell (rancid)
- in flavour (usually lack of flavour)
- in consistency (dry, spongy, etc.)

conformation and appearance.

Class B

The minimum standard for a whole bird to be graded as B is that the carcase is:-

- Intact, taking into account presentation as described in the Regulations.
- Clean, free from foreign matter, dirt or blood.
- Free from any foreign smell.
- Free from blood stains unless small and unobtrusive.
- Free of protruding broken bones.
- Free from severe bruising.
- For fresh poultry, there should be no trace of the carcase having been frozen.

Class A

In addition to the points above, the following conditions apply to the carcasses for Class A:-

- Must have good conformation.
- The flesh must be plump.
- The breast must be well developed (described as broad, long and fleshy).
- The legs should be fleshy.
- On chickens, young ducks or ducklings and turkeys there should be a thin regular layer of fat on the breast, back and thighs.
- On cocks, hens, ducks and young geese, a thicker layer of fat is permissible.
- On geese, a moderate to thick fat layer shall be present all over the carcase.
- A few small feathers, stubs (quill ends) and hairs (filoplumes) may be present on the breast, legs, rump, foot joints and wing tips.
- In the case of boiling fowl, ducks, turkeys and geese, a few feathers may also be present on other parts.
- Some damage, bruising and discolouration is allowed, but it must be small and unobtrusive, and not present on the breast or legs.
- Wing tips may be missing.
- A slight redness in wing tips and follicles is allowed.
- For frozen or quick-frozen poultry there should be no traces of freezer burn* on the breast or legs. Small, unobtrusive traces of freezer burn are allowed on other parts of the carcase.

Grading test and sampling

Place of Testing

Checks on compliance with the grading criteria, once the enforcement regime is in place, will be carried out in licensed slaughterhouses or cutting plants by the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) and local authority officers elsewhere where grading or so-

¹ In the case of breast fillets, these defective units may also comprise fillets with up to 2% in weight of cartilage (flexible tip of the sternum).

² Tolerance within each species, not from one species to another.

called 'cutting out' takes place. Port Health Officers may carry out checks for poultrymeat imported from a third country and unloaded in a port health district.

Batch Testing in slaughterhouses, cutting plants and wholesale or retail warehouses

The tests must be carried out on a sample from a batch of poultrymeat. For the purpose of these Regulations, a batch is defined as the number of units from the same production run of the same species, type, and class. The size of a batch will vary from site to site and product to product. Sampling should be carried out at a point in the production run after all grading checks have been completed. Production runs that yield less than 100 units cannot be tested, as they cannot produce a statistically valid sample.

Third Country Consignments

Grading checks on poultrymeat from third countries will be carried out if Class A or B appears on labelling. These checks will run in conjunction with veterinary checks but will not unduly delay the import. A batch, in this context, is a single consignment.

Failure Rate

If the number of units found not to comply with the grading criteria exceeds that shown in Tables 1 (for Class A) or 2 (for Class B) the batch may not be marketed under that class.

Table 1 – Sample size and tolerances for grading tests – For Class A

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Batch Size	Sample Size	Tolerable Number of Defective Units:	
		Total Allowed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fails to meet Class A criteria, or ● Fails to meet definitions of the various named cuts¹, or ● Fails to meet required forms in which a carcase may be presented for sale 	
100-500	30	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fails to meet definitions of a carcase² ● Fails to meet minimum grading requirements (i.e. Class B)
501-3200	50	7	
>3200	80	10	

This means that, for example, in a check on compliance with the grading criteria, in a sample of 80 chicken breasts, no more than 4 could fail the minimum criteria to be met, in order to be graded. If there are no minimum criteria failures then there is an allowance for up to 10 Class A criteria failures. If more than 4 fail the minimum criteria or the total of minimum criteria failures plus any other failures is more than

³ In the case of breast fillets, these defective units may also comprise fillets with up to 2% in weight of cartilage (flexible tip of the sternum).

⁴ Tolerance within each species, not from one species to another.

10 then the whole batch can not be marketed as Class A.

The tolerable number of defective units is doubled in the case of Class B poultrymeat (see Table 2). Similarly to the example quoted above, if more than 8 failed to meet the minimum criteria or the combined total of minimum and other failures is more than 20, then the whole batch may not be marketed as graded poultry.

Table 2 – Sample size and tolerances for grading tests – For Class B

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Batch Size	Sample Size	Tolerable Number of Defective Units:	
		Total Allowed	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fails to meet definitions of the various named cuts³ ● Fails to meet required forms in which a carcase may be presented for sale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fails to meet definitions of a carcase⁴ ● Fails to meet minimum grading requirements (i.e. Class B)
100-500	30	10	4
501-3200	50	14	6
>3200	80	20	8

Definition of whole carcasses

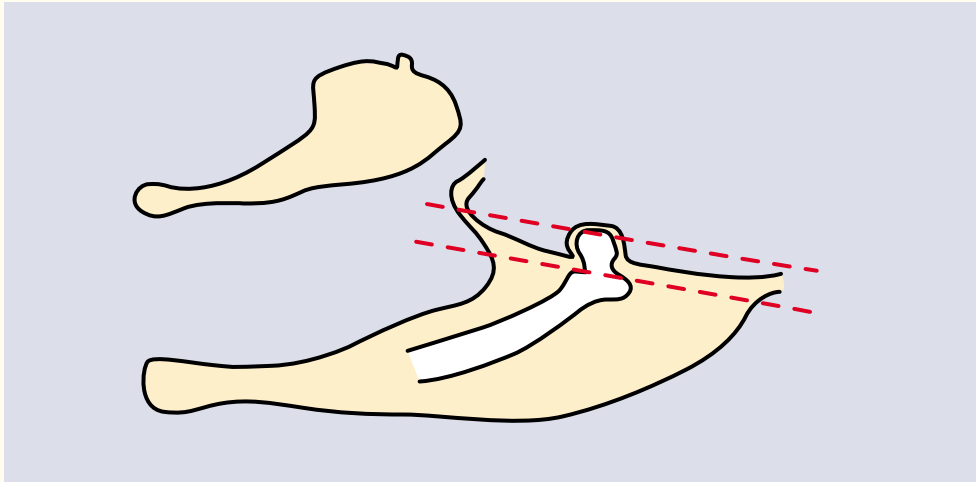
The Regulations define a 'carcase' as the whole body of a bird of the species referred to in article 1.1 to the Regulations, after bleeding, plucking and evisceration. Removal of the heart, liver, lungs, gizzard, crop, kidneys, legs at the tarsus or the head shall be optional. An eviscerated carcase may be presented for sale with or without giblets, meaning heart, liver, gizzard and neck, inserted into the abdominal cavity.

Poultry carcasses covered by the Regulations must be presented for sale in one of the following forms:-

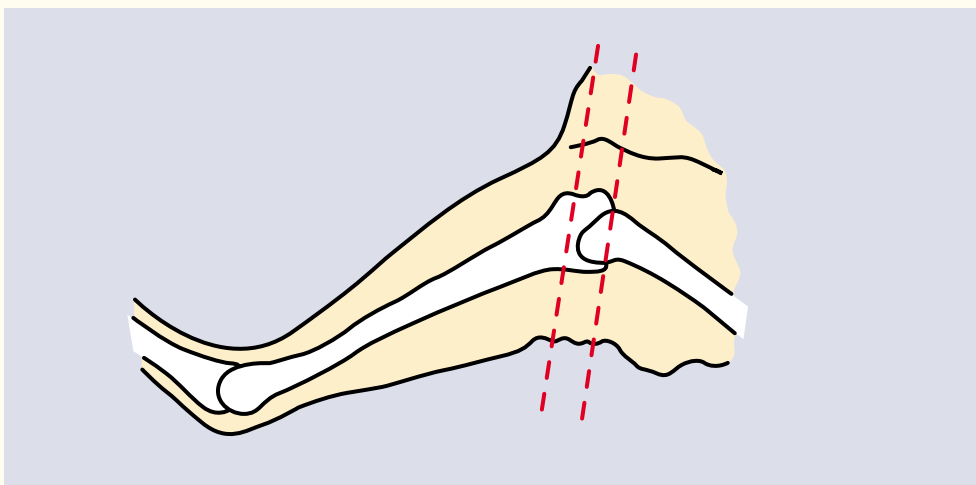
- **'Partially eviscerated'** – a form of presentation more common on the continent, in which the heart, liver, lungs, gizzard, crop and kidneys have not been removed from the carcase.
- **(Eviscerated) with giblets** or **(eviscerated) without giblets** – giblets shall comprise only the heart, neck, gizzard and liver. Livers shall be without gall bladders. The gizzard shall be without the horned membrane and with the contents removed. The heart may be with or without the pericardial sac if the neck remains attached to the carcase, it is not considered as one of the giblets. Where one of these organs is customarily not included with the carcase for sale, its absence shall be mentioned in the labelling.

⁵ For an explanation of 'cuts shall be made at the joints', see diagrams 1-5.

⁶ The terms that have weight criteria (i.e. chicken leg with a portion of the back and unseparated wings) will have to be weighed on the slaughterhouse scales. Diagrams 3-5 serve only to act as a guideline as to where cuts should be made to assess whether the criteria has been met and does not replace the need to weigh the cuts.



Definitions of whole carcasses and species descriptions are detailed within the relevant chapter.



Definition of poultry parts

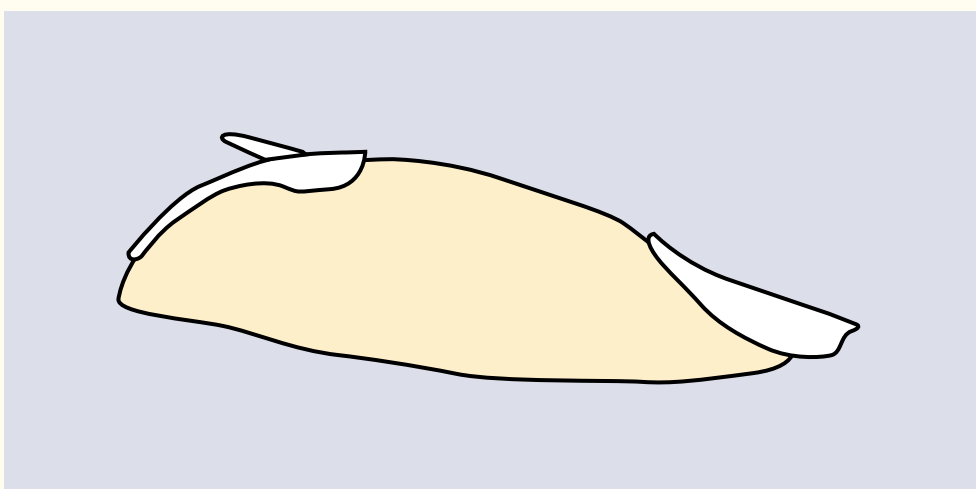
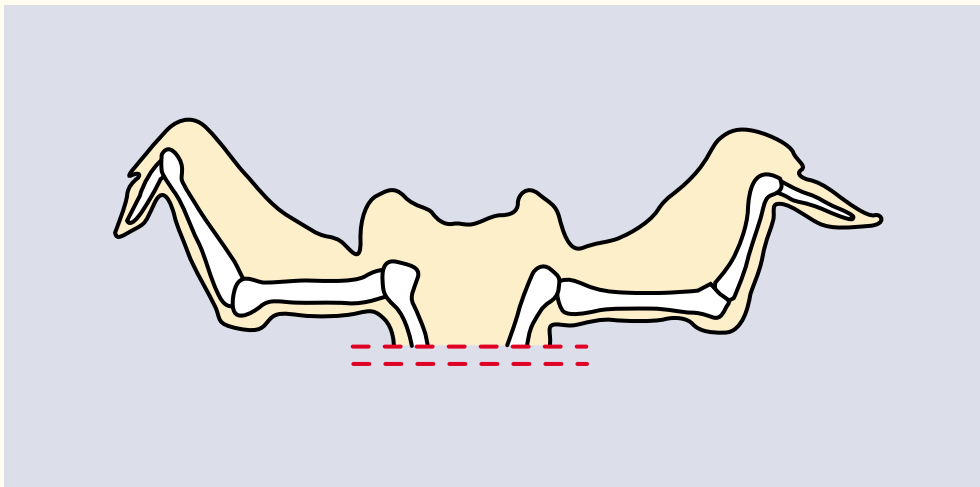
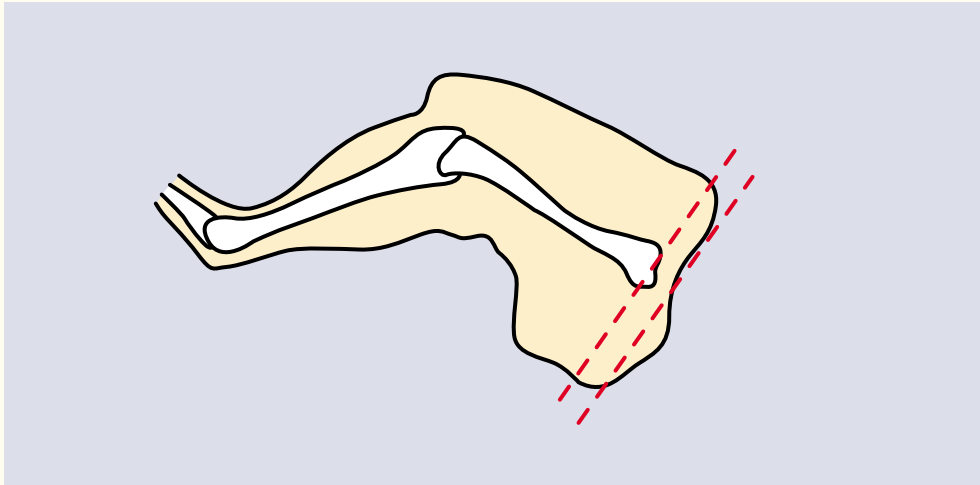


Table 3 – *The Regulations apply to certain poultry cuts as defined below.*

⁷ Derived from diagrams in Annex 1A of Regulation 1538/91, as inserted by Regulation 2891/93 (OJ L263, 22.10.93, p.20).

⁸ These diagrams are not included in the Regulations, and are included for guidance only.



⁸ These diagrams are not included in the Regulations, and are included for guidance only.

Terms	Description
(a) Half	half of the carcase, obtained by a longitudinal cut in a plane along the sternum and the backbone
(b) Quarter	leg quarter or breast quarter, obtained by a transversal cut of a half
(c) Unseparated leg quarters	both leg quarters united by a portion of the back, with or without the rump
(d) Breast	the sternum and the ribs, or part thereof, distributed on both sides of it, together with the surrounding musculature. The breast may be presented as a whole or a half
(e) Leg	the femur, tibia and fibula together with the surrounding musculature. The two cuts shall be made at the joints ⁵
(f) Chicken leg with a portion of the back	the weight of the back does not exceed 25% of that of the whole cut
(g) Thigh	the femur together with the surrounding musculature. The two cuts shall be made at the joints ⁶
(h) Drumstick	the tibia and fibula together with the surrounding musculature. The two cuts shall be made at the joints ⁶
(i) Wing	the humerus, radius, and ulna, together with the surrounding musculature. In the case of turkey wings, humerus or radius/ulna together with the surrounding musculature may be presented separately. The tip, including the carpal bones, may or may not have been removed. The cuts shall be made at the joints
(j) Unseparated wings	both wings united by a portion of the back where the weight ⁴ of the latter does not exceed 45% of that of the whole cut
(k) Breast fillet	the whole or half of the breast deboned, i.e. without sternum and ribs. In the case of turkey breast, the fillet may comprise the deep pectoral muscle only
(l) Breast fillet with wishbone	the breast fillet without skin with the clavicle and the cartilaginous point of the sternum only, the weight ⁶ of clavicle and cartilage not to exceed 3% of that of the cut
(m) Magret, maigret,	breast fillet of ducks and geese comprising skin and subcutaneous fat covering the breast muscle, without the deep pectoral muscle
(n) Deboned turkey leg meat	turkey thighs and/or drumsticks deboned, i.e. without femur, tibia and fibula, whole, diced or cut into strips.

Products listed under (d) to (k) in the table above may be presented with or without the skin. The absence of the skin in the case of products listed under (d) to (j) or the presence of the skin in the case of the product listed under (k) must be mentioned on labelling.

Diagram 1⁷ – Cut separating thigh/leg and back – delimitation of hip joint