

BEEF STANDARDS



Firsthand Foods sells local, fresh, pasture-raised beef produced by a network of small-scale producers who have developed the unique expertise necessary to raise and finish high quality beef on pasture in the South. All of our beef producers abide by these standards:

LOCAL

Our beef producers live and farm in North Carolina. Most are centrally located in the Piedmont region not far from our cooperating processors. One farmer lives just over the border in Virginia.

PASTURE-RAISED

Our producers raise their animals exclusively outdoors on pasture in accordance with NC State University's guidelines for pasture-raised and finished beef production. (<https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/nc-state-local-pasture-raised-and-pasture-finished-beef-production-guidelines>). At no time do our beef cattle live in a feedlot or in feedlot like conditions. All of our producers implement intensive rotational grazing as a means to develop high quality forages and protect soil and water quality. This includes seeding with annual and perennial forages to provide nourishment and combat endophytic fescue, a common forage throughout the Piedmont region that can be toxic to beef cattle in the heat of summer.

NO GROWTH-PROMOTING ANTIBIOTICS

Our producers do not use growth-promoting antibiotics. This prophylactic use of antibiotics is unnecessary when beef cattle are raised in a low-stress environment on pasture and consume a high-fiber diet. If a beef animal gets sick, we encourage a one-time treatment with an antibiotic to prevent suffering and require that all required withdrawal periods are followed prior to slaughter.

NO HORMONAL IMPLANTS

Our producers do not use hormonal implants because of concerns related to potential residues in meat and potential adverse human health impacts.

NO ANIMAL BY-PRODUCTS

Our producers do not use feed that includes animal by-products because of concerns related to the development of mad cow disease.

NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTATION

Beef animals are herbivores and are healthiest when they eat a diet comprised primarily of grass and forages. Cattle need to gain weight consistently throughout their lives, which can be a challenge in the South, especially during the summer months. To ensure consistent weight gain, our producers hand-feed a custom blend high-fiber / low-starch supplement that consists of four ingredients: corn gluten feed (protein portion of the corn kernel; not related to wheat gluten), soy hulls (fibrous skin of the soybean), peanut hulls (fibrous skin of the peanut), and wheat midds (fibrous and protein portions of wheat leftover from the milling process). A very small number of our producers choose to supplement with locally available spent brewer's and/or distillers grains (low starch, high fiber portions of various grains leftover from making beer and/or distilled spirits).

BREED SELECTION

All of our beef is at least 50 percent or more Angus, a breed that consistently yields tenderness, flavor and marbling. When other breeds are incorporated it is to add good mothering characteristics and heat tolerance, both important factors in producing quality beef in the South.

TRACEABILITY

All of our beef animals are raised on the farm where they were born. Each cut of meat can be traced back to the farm and individual animal where it was sourced. This level of traceability is rarely seen in the meat industry.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Achieving exceptional quality beef on pasture in southern growing conditions is part art and part science. Our farmers are leaders in the industry and continuously explore new and innovative techniques for producing quality meat in the heat. While breed is certainly an important influence, so too is knowing when an animal is “finished” or sufficiently mature and fleshy to produce intramuscular marbling. We frequently visit with our farmers and provide carcass quality feedback on a weekly basis, including grading each batch of beef for ribeye marbling. This information and feedback loop is critical for producers to make informed decisions regarding genetic selection, nutrition and pasture management.

**Corn gluten should not be confused with the gluten found in wheat.*