

# 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:*

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## **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, NEVER CONFINED**

Our producers raise their animals exclusively outdoors on pasture in accordance with [NC State University's guidelines for pasture-raised beef production](#). 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 SUB-THERAPEUTIC ANTIBIOTICS**

Our producers do not use sub-therapeutic antibiotics to promote growth. 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 does get sick, we encourage a one-time treatment with an antibiotic to prevent suffering and require that all required withdrawal periods are followed before slaughter.

## **NO ADDED HORMONES**

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 raise their own grains for feed and do not add animal by-products.

## **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 help offset poor pasture quality, our producers hand-feed supplements in small quantities, including soy hulls (the skin of a soybean) and/or corn gluten (the non-starchy components in a corn kernel, and not to be confused with the gluten found in wheat).

## **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.