Grass-fed Guidance

Humane Farm Animal Care
Animal Care Standards
2025

Grass-fed Guidance Document*

contains excerpts from individual Certified Humane® standards, to highlight the Grass-fed Dietary requirements for:

Beef Cattle
Bison
Dairy Cattle
Lamb

***For certification purposes grass-fed protocols for a particular species must be used in conjunction with the complete Certified Humane® standard for that species.**

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HUMANE FARM ANIMAL CARE

Humane Farm Animal Care is a non-profit charity whose mission is to improve the lives of farm animals by providing viable, credible, duly monitored standards for humane food production and assuring consumers that certified producers meet these standards.

Humane Farm Animal Care is recognized by a consortium of Animal Protection Organizations, Individuals, and Foundations.

The Humane Farm Animal Care Standards have been developed to provide the only approved standards for the rearing, handling, transport and slaughter of Beef Cattle, Bison, Buffalo, Broiler Chickens, Dairy Cattle & Young Dairy Beef, Ducks, Goats, Lamb & Sheep, Laying Hens & Laying Hen Hatcheries, Pigs, Red Deer, Salmon, Tilapia, & Turkeys for use by the "Certified Humane®" program. These standards incorporate scientific research, veterinary advice, and the practical experience of the farming industry.

Animal welfare is improved when livestock managers adhere to the following:

- Provision of access to wholesome and nutritious feed
- Appropriate environmental design
- Caring and responsible planning and management
- Skilled, knowledgeable, and conscientious animal care
- Considerate and respectful handling, transport, and slaughter

HUMANE FARM ANIMAL CARE'S SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Leading animal scientists, veterinarians, and producers worked with Humane Farm Animal Care to develop the *Animal Care Standards* for humane farming and continue to work with Humane Farm Animal Care on a continuing basis to review new information and research pertaining to improving the lives of farm animals bring raised for food, worldwide.

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

A. The Certified Humane® Label

The Certified Humane® program was developed to certify products from animals of farms and ranches that adhere to these standards. Upon satisfactory application and inspection, farmers and ranchers will be certified and may use the Certified Humane® Raised and Handled logo. Program participants are inspected and monitored by *Humane Farm Animal Care* annually. Charges levied cover inspections and program costs, which include promotional materials which help promote the products of the producers that are Certified Humane®.

B. Guide to the Use of the Animal Care Standards

- The broad objectives of the standard are described at the beginning of each section.
- The numbered requirements are the standards, all of which must be complied with.
- These standards are written to cover operations in varying geographic and temperature regions and utilizing different systems. Therefore, not all sections in these standards will be applicable to every operation
- Boxed sections are included to provide supporting information or additional guidance.
- Farmers and ranchers must also comply with any local, state, federal or veterinary requirements that ensure the safety of their animals, preserve the environment, and/or help manage biosecurity concerns.

C. Guidance documents are to be used in conjunction with the Standards.

- Guidance documents that are published separately from the Standards are offered to provide **easily accessible viewing** of certain topics taken directly from the standards e.g. Grass-fed or Pasture-raised requirements. They are not meant to be relied upon as stand-alone standards.
- Some guidance documents are also published to offer templates and additional information for use of antibiotics and medications, understanding stunning methods for large livestock & poultry or non-fast molting programs for Laying Hens, for example.

Part 2: Grass-fed Diet Objectives & Basics

OBJECTIVES: All Livestock must have access to fresh water and a diet formulated or assessed to maintain full health and promote a positive state of well-being. Feed and water must be distributed in such a way that livestock can eat and drink without undue competition.

BASICS: If a producer wants to take this a step further and maintain their animals on a grass-fed diet, they may do so following the specific Certified Humane® program designed for the species they want to raise as Grass-fed. Once they have been able to successfully follow the specific standards for "grass-fed" and as long as all other Humane Farm Animal Care Standards for the Certified humane® program have been met, they many carry that claim through to their advertising and wholesale or consumer facing packaging. For sales in the U.S.A., this packaging and claims must also be approved by Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).

Grass-fed Beef Guidelines - excerpt from complete Beef Cattle Standards:

D. Grass-Fed Systems

OBJECTIVES: To use a Grass-Fed claim on Certified Humane® beef products, these particular standards must be followed in addition to all the other numbered _____in the complete Beef Cattle Standards. The decision to follow this part of the program and use the Grass-fed claim is optional.

FW 22: Dietary requirements

a. Diet for cattle must consist exclusively of grass and forage, eligible supplementary feed, and nutritional supplementation. Forage may include vegetative matter from annual and perennial grasses; legumes such as alfalfa, clover, and peas; brassicas such as beets, turnips, and kale; and cereal grain in the pre-grain state.

b. Producers should actively manage grazing to maintain ground cover and protect erosion-prone areas. A grazing plan is recommended for all producers but required where:

- The average annual stocking rate for the past 3 years exceeds 3 Dry Sheep Equivalents (DSE) per hectare /100mm rainfall in regions with average rainfall above 750mm, or
- 2 DSE/ha/100mm rainfall in regions with average rainfall 750mm or less (use natural rainfall only for both DSE and regional calculations).

The plan must outline tactical grazing methods, planned rest periods for forage recovery, and strategies to match feed supply with demand and prevent overgrazing. The plans must be available for review during inspection or upon request

c. Grass and forage derived from grazing of pasture must account for a minimum of 50% of dry matter intake (DMI) over the lifetime of the cattle. As such, allowable supplementary feed including hay, haylage, baleage, silage, and alternate sources of natural roughage – all forms of harvested grasses and forage -- must not be provided as the exclusive dietary source over the lifetime of the animal.

Forage type	Dry matter (% of body weight)	As-fed (lb.)
Low-quality hay	1.0 to 2.0	11 to 22
Average-quality hay	1.5 to 2.5	17 to 28
High-quality hay	2.2 to 3.3	24 to 37
Green pasture	2.0. to 3.0	65 to 100

d. Nutritional supplements are permitted for the delivery of essential minerals and vitamins and may not include any prohibited items as listed in FW

….continued Grass-fed Beef Cattle guidelines

23. Supplementation includes projecting dry matter intake from varying qualities of forage balanced with supplementation

e. Available feed must be nutritionally sufficient at every stage of production. This includes ensuring that calves prior to weaning also have access to milk and colostrum and nutritionally balanced forage thereafter.

f. Lists of ingredients (from tags, labels or spec sheets, etc.) must be kept for all feed and nutritional supplements given to cattle. Records must be available for review at the time of inspection and reflect all supplementary feed and nutritional supplements availed to cattle over their lifetime.

g. Cereal grain crops such as wheat, barley, maize, oats and sorghum may be grazed in their pre-grain state, defined herein referencing Zadok's Decimal Code for Growth Stages in Cereals, and limited to a maximum of decimal code 69 on that scale.

FW 23: Prohibited feedstuffs & ingredients

a. Providing grain, grain by-products, or any form of feed concentrate that contains cereal grains is prohibited. This includes barley, corn, oats, rye, rice, triticale, wheat, millet, and sorghum.

b. Urea as a feedstuff is prohibited but can be used as a supplement to improve nutritional value of poor-quality forage (see FW 24).

FW 24: Feed Supplements

a. Nutritional supplements are permitted to enhance the nutritional benefits from permitted feed including for the delivery of essential minerals and vitamins and may not include any prohibited ingredients listed in FW 23.

1. Molasses is permitted as a carrier for vitamins and minerals and must not be used as a standalone energy supplement.
2. Apple cider vinegar and kelp are acceptable supplements to balance a forage-based diet.
3. Feed grade urea (a natural saliva component cycled from ruminal metabolism) may be used as a supplement. Urea incorporated into feed at a max. volume of 3% or less will increase the bioavailability of protein. This is essential in times of drought or other periods when there is too limited a quantity of high-quality forage available.

b. Grain or other prohibited substances must not be withheld from a sick or low-body-condition animal (see FW 5) to preserve the animal's grass-fed status.

c. If prohibited substances are provided to restore the health of the animal, the animal must be removed from the grass-fed herd, the relocation must be documented.

….continued Grass-fed Beef Cattle guidelines

FW 25: Pasture Access

a. Cattle must have continuous access to pasture after the calf-rearing phase.

b. Confined feeding in feedlots or similar environments is expressly prohibited.

c. Animals may only be removed from pasture for short-term confinement for husbandry only reasons (including shelter from during extreme weather events to ensure animal welfare or to avoid extensive damage to pasture). Any such event must be limited and thoroughly documented for approval by Certified Humane®.

FW 26: New and Mixed Herds

a. For new program applicants with existing herds, all animals presented for the grass-fed program must have been born on the farm being audited and be matched with documented substantiation of adherence to the grass-fed standard or purchased from operations already

carrying the Certified Humane® Grass-Fed certification.

b. Grass-fed cattle intended for meat or dairy may be managed on the same farm as non-grass-fed animals, as long as there is an identification system in place to prevent commingling especially of GF calves with non-grass-fed lactating cows to ensure clear traceability of the GF animals

Grass-fed Bison Guidelines - Excerpt from complete Bison Standards

***OBJECTIVES**: Humane Farm Animal Care regards the iconic species of American Bison as, distinctly different from domestic livestock. Following the Animal Care Standards for Grass-Fed Systems is not optional for Bison. The following animal welfare standards must be met in order to be in compliance with the Certified Humane® program as well as to make a Grass-fed claim.*

Grass-fed programs must be designed intricately to ensure animal welfare while meeting consumer expectations. Certified Humane® is a welfare-oriented program with science-based standards. Therefore, all standards, including the standards for Grass-Fed Systems, are written with dedication to scientific information and animal welfare.

FW 22: Diet requirements

a.—Diet for bison must consist exclusively of grasses, forbs, medics and all other naturally occurring members of a plant community in a pasture and/or prairie biological system.

b. Ingestion of seeds naturally attached to herbage, forage, and browse)se is considered incidental and therefore acceptable. Records of any potential ingestion of incidental ingredients must be kept and made available to the Humane Farm Animal Care inspector and at other times, upon request.

c. Records (e.g., feed tags or invoices) must be kept of all feed, including nutritional supplements, given to bison. These records must list all ingredients and be available for at least two years.

a. Non-grain cubes, pellets or other non-grain compounds that are part of the grass-fed bison diet may be used for low stress human-animal interactions and for handling herds. (applicable to any Bison feed management program)

FW 23: Prohibited feedstuffs

a. Providing grain, grain by-products, or any other form of feed concentrate is prohibited. This includes barley, corn, oats, rye, rice, triticale, wheat, millet, and sorghum.
b. Urea as a feedstuff is prohibited.

FW 24: Feed and dietary supplementation

a. If prohibited substances other than carriers for vitamin and mineral supplements are provided to restore the health of the animal, the animal must be removed from the grass-fed herd, with this relocation documented.

b. However, grain or other prohibited substances must not be withheld from a sick or low-body-condition animal (see FW 5) to preserve the animal's grass-fed status.

FW 25: Pasture access

a. Bison must be provided continuous access to pasture or rangeland from birth to harvest.

….continued Grass-fed Bison guidelines

b. All dietary provisions must be in accordance with FW 22 in case of any confinement due to physical and emotional transitions.
c. Bison must not be raised in confinement or in feedlots. Confinement and feedlot population density parameters are available in the NBA Bison Producers Handbook. Intermittent spacious transitional sequestration must exceed these parameters.
d. Bison must be moved to a transitional pasture or trap to begin their adjustment to the changes in their routine or management which may include the need for:

- Emotional conditioning (which includes more human interaction) prior to and in preparation for transport and harvest
- Any low stress gathering and handling.
- Emotional & physical conditioning through weaning
- Disaster Management such as fire, flood and other.
- Medical individual or herd management and rehabilitation.
- Resting grasslands to advance soil health and regenerative precepts.

e. Assessment Checklist to evaluate transitional pasture/trap suitability:

- Do the bison appear content? Laying down, playing etc.
- Are the bison pacing the fences?
- Are the bison continuously fighting?
- Are there any features that attract the interest of the bison and interaction? inclusion of enrichments that offer interest and activity emulating features of open prairie. Natural terrain and vegetation.
- Is every nutritional need met for each individual animal?

B. Food – Specific Provisions for Calves

FW 13: Diet requirements for calves
a. Calves must be fed a wholesome diet, - appropriate for their age, weight, behavioral and physiological needs.
b. Calves must not be weaned before the age of 6 months.

> *A low stress method weaning method as described in The Bison Producers' Handbook is recommended if calves are not left naturally with their family units or herd.*

c. Weaned calves should have adequate grazing or be provided a diet of grass hay (ad libitum).
d. Antibiotics should not be used except therapeutically, as directed by a veterinarian.

….continued Grass-fed Bison guidelines

FW 14: Colostrum
Every new calf must receive adequate colostrum from its dam, from another newly calved cow, or from a frozen colostrum source, as soon as possible after it is born and certainly within the first 8 hours of its life.

> *Colostrum must be received within the first eight hours of each calf's life, and it should be allowed to continue to suckle for the first 24 hours after birth. When suckling the cow is not possible, sufficient colostrum should be provided manually. Approximately 6 liters (1.6 gallons) of colostrum should be administered by stomach tube, or bottle or bucket over the first 24 hrs. (1.5 liters in each of 4 feedings). For a further 48 hours, calves should receive approximately 6 liters of colostrum/whole milk daily in at least two feedings.*

FW 15: Orphan Calves
a. Intentional orphaning of bison calves is prohibited.
b. All orphaned calves or those unable to nurse should receive liquid food twice daily at least through the first 5 weeks of life until they are eating adequate quantities of suitable solid food.
c. Sheep or goat's milk replacer should be utilized (The Bison Producers' Handbook) and mixed according to the manufacturer's instructions.
d. Orphan calves must have access to starter feed appropriate for bison calves and grass hay or natural forage after 8 days of age.
e. If calves are bucket fed, each calf should have access to an individual bucket.
f. Orphan calves must not be weaned (ceasing to feed milk or milk replacer) before 6 months of age unless directed by a veterinarian. Nutritional weaning must be accomplished gradually by either diluting the milk with water or reducing the milk volume over a period of at least 5 days.

Grass-fed Dairy Cow Guidelines – Excerpt from complete Dairy Cow Standards

D. Grass-Fed Systems

OBJECTIVES: Following the Animal Care Standards for Grass-Fed Systems is optional. Where cattle are grass-fed, the following animal welfare standards must be met in order to make a Grass-Fed claim.

Grass-fed programs must be designed intricately to ensure animal welfare while meeting consumer expectations. Certified Humane® is a welfare-oriented program with science-based standards. Therefore, all standards, including the standards for Grass-Fed Systems, are written with dedication to scientific information and animal welfare.

FW 25: Diet requirements

a. Diet for cattle must consist exclusively of grass and forage, with permitted feed supplements as described in FW 27.
b. Ingestion of seeds naturally attached to herbage, forage, and browse is considered incidental and therefore acceptable. Records of any potential ingestion of incidental ingredients must be kept and made available to the Humane Farm Animal Care inspector and at other times, upon request.
c. Records (e.g., feed tags or invoices) must be kept of all feed, including nutritional supplements, given to Dairy Cattle. These records must list all ingredients and be available for at least two years.

FW 26: Prohibited feedstuffs

a. Providing grain, grain by-products, or any other form of feed concentrate is prohibited. This includes barley, corn, oats, rye, rice, triticale, wheat, millet, and sorghum.
b. Urea as a feedstuff is prohibited.

FW 27: Feed and Dietary Supplementation

a. If additional specific nutrients are needed to maintain the health and body condition of the animal, the producer must formulate a supplementation plan with the guidance of their dairy nutritionist and/or veterinarian. The supplementation plan must be submitted to HFAC for approval if the animals are to maintain the Grass-Fed claim.
    1. Supplementation must consider:
        a) Nutritional value of the grass (Metabolizable Energy (ME), protein, etc.), with forage or grass analyses conducted as needed (e.g. seasonally) to ensure accurate supplementation; and
        b) Age, life stage, and breed of animals.
b. If prohibited substances other than carriers for vitamin and mineral supplements are provided to restore the health of the animal, the animal must be removed from the grass-fed herd, with this relocation documented. However, grain or other prohibited

….continued Grass-fed Dairy Cattle guidelines

c. substances must not be withheld from a sick or low-body-condition animal (see FW 5) to preserve the animal's grass-fed status.

Molasses, kelp, and apple cider vinegar are acceptable vitamin and mineral supplements.

FW 28: Pasture access

a. Cattle must have continuous access to pasture by the time they are weaned.
b. Introduction to forage is crucial for establishing the correct ruminal pH to facilitate rumen development in young calves. Therefore, calves require access to forage prior to weaning and by 30 days old at the latest in accordance with FW 15, in order to be ready to transition to the grass-fed diet.
c. Cattle must not be raised in confinement or in feedlots.
d. Animals must only be removed from pasture due to risk of animal health or safety, or if there is damage to pasture due to wet or drought conditions. Lack of access must be documented with reasons specified.

FW 29: Mixed herds

Grass-fed cattle intended for meat or dairy may be managed on the same farm as non-grass-fed animals, except for non-grass-fed lactating cows, as long as there is an identification system in place to prevent commingling and ensure traceability of cattle.

Grass-Fed Grass-fed Lamb& Sheep Guidelines – Excerpt from complete Lamb & Sheep Standards

All Grass-fed Lamb & Sheep should be raised with maximum access to pasture during the grazing season. Grass and forage should be the feed source for the entire lifetime of these ruminant animals except for milk consumed prior to weaning.

FW 1 GF: Wholesome, nutritious feed

a. Lamb and Sheep must have a wholesome diet that meets or exceed nutrient requirements as determined by the National Research Council.
b. The diet must be appropriate for their age and breed;
c. The feed must be provided to them in sufficient quantity to maintain good health.
d. The feed must not contain any prohibited feedstuffs, *(see FW 4GF Substances prohibited in feed)*

FW 2 GF: Free access to grass and forage

a. Lamb & Sheep must have access to nutritious feed daily, except when directed by a veterinarian.
b. Their diet must be derived solely from forage, consisting of grass (annual and perennial), forbs (e.g. legumes, Brassica), browse, or cereal grain crops in the vegetative (**pre-grain**) state.
Also including:
c. Hay, haylage, balage, silage, roughage, crop residue without grain, forage products or roughage products on pasture, or as necessary when removed from pasture (during weaning, inclement weather or events that may threaten the health, safety and welfare of the ruminant, natural resources or when conditions compromise the ability to graze).
c. Incidental consumption of root crops while foraging is permitted
(See FW 9GF for permitted supplementation)

FW 3 GF: Feed records

a. Producers must have written records of the feed constituents, the inclusion rate and constituents of compound feeds and feed supplements, including records from outside sources; and
b. These records must be made available to the Humane Farm Animal Care during inspection or upon request.

FW 4 GF: Substances prohibited in feed

a. Grain or grain byproducts are prohibited
b. No feedstuffs containing mammalian or avian-derived protein sources are permitted, except for milk and milk products prior to weaning
c. Lamb and Sheep must not be fed antibiotics, or other substances deliberately to promote growth or feed efficiency. d. Antibiotics can and should be used in individual animals only therapeutically, for instance, for disease treatment as directed by a veterinarian.
e. If an animal is subject to inadvertent exposure to non-forage feedstuffs or directed by a veterinarian to provide to ensure the animal's well-being during adverse environmental or physical conditions, the producer must document.

…Continued Grass-fed program for Lamb & Sheep

FW 5 GF: Body condition

a. The animal's body condition must be planned, monitored and maintained according to the stage of production.
b. The lambs or sheep should not, at any time, have a body condition score of less than 2 on the "Body Condition Scoring of Sheep" (Clair Engle, Department of Dairy and Animal Science, Pennsylvania State University, publication: DAS 94-09

Score	Appearance	Condition
0	Emaciated, unthrifty, weak	Spine sharp and prominent, no fat cover, wasted muscle structure, transverse processes protrude
1	Extremely thin, unthrifty but agile	Spinous processes prominent, no fat cover, transverse processes protrude
2	Thin, but strong and thrifty	Spinous processes prominent but smooth, slight fat cover, muscle fullness, transverse processes rounded
3	Moderate, thrifty with limited fat deposits in fore-rib	Spinous processes rounded, muscle development full, transverse processes rounded
4	Fat	Spinous processes evident only as a line, fat cover considerable but firm, transverse processes cannot be felt
5	Obese	Spinous processes not detectable, fat cover dense and soft, transverse processes not detectable

FW 6 GF: Avoiding sudden changes in feed

a. Efforts must be made to avoid sudden changes in type and quantity of feed especially a concern during drought conditions or extreme weather.
b. Mineral mixtures must be specifically designed, and appropriate for the animal to avoid causing problems (e.g., urinary problems in male animals).

FW 8 GF: Pasture Usage

a. Access: During the grass-growing season, when climatic conditions allow, lamb and sheep must have access to the pasture or an outside exercise area.
b. Safety: Practices must be in place to prevent access to poisonous plants and unsuitable feedstuffs.

FW 9 GF: Permitted Supplementation

1. Mineral and vitamin supplements or soybean hulls, a highly digestible low-starch fiber source, a byproduct of soybean processing (can be pelleted).
2. Supplemental feeding of a non-concentrate ration: Grass hay or pelleted grass like alfalfa pellets as well as cottonseed with its high protein and fat content (from the cotton plant which produces fiber not grain) is also acceptable.

FW 11 GF: Appropriate feed for special needs lamb or sheep

Lamb or Sheep that are unable to eat normally due to damaged, missing, or loose teeth, must be supplied with feed that they are able to eat and digest (e.g., sufficiently long grass or concentrates).

FW 12 GF: Trough feeding (if used)

a. Troughs must be kept clean and stale feed removed.
b. There must be sufficient trough space for forages or supplemental feed to ensure that, all lamb and sheep have sufficient access to meet their nutritional requirements.

…Continued Grass-fed program for Lamb & Sheep

FW 13 GF: Cleaning tools used for liquid feeding

Equipment and utensils used for liquid (bottle) feeding must be thoroughly cleansed daily, and routinely sanitized.

FW 14 GF: Maintaining Wholesomeness of stored feed such as hay and silage

1. Must be protected from vermin and other animals; stored in covered hoppers, bins or other storage containers to reduce contamination by bird feces and other animals
2. Must be of a good quality; and
3. Palatable to lambs and sheep.

FW 17 GF: Weaning

a. Lambs must not be weaned before 5 weeks of age.
b. Lambs must have access to dry feed (hay, grass) from 2 weeks of age to encourage proper rumen develop

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