

Effectively Teaching Meat Judging Specifications

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The specifications used in Intercollegiate Meat Judging are based on the Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications (IMPS). However, these specifications have been modified slightly from the official IMPS to make them more usable in the competitive environment of a meat judging contest.

In preparing yourself to be proficient in a specifications class in a meat judging contest, you must go through the following three steps: 1) Memorization, 2) Interpretation, 3) Application. The specifications class can be the most frustrating aspect of meat judging to a beginning meats judge because of the vast amount of information that must be memorized. However, the specifications class also can be one of the most rewarding aspects of meat judging to an experienced meat judge because a perfect score of 100 is a challenging, yet attainable, goal. In other aspects of meat judging, grading and reasons for example, a perfect score is probably an unrealistic goal, but a perfect score in the specifications class can be an exciting driving force to push for excellence. The first step in mastering specifications is to memorize them. A student must not only memorize the specifications but also must memorize the corresponding defect codes on the answer card. This memorization is easier and much more effective if the student has seen the actual meat cuts and understands how the cuts are fabricated from the carcass.

The second step in mastering specifications is being able to interpret the specifications as they relate to acceptable and unacceptable meat cuts. A student must know specifically where to look on a certain cut to ascertain the adherence to a certain specification. A student must be aware of the different situations that are acceptable and those that are unacceptable. Understanding why each of the specifications is written as it is, allows a student to understand how to interpret the specification. For example, the reason that the *subscapularis*

muscle cannot extend past the dorsal edge of the base of the medial ridge of the blade bone on a pork loin is to prevent the seller from leaving too much pork shoulder on the pork loin. Lastly, a student must learn how to apply the specifications in a contest setting. In a contest setting, a student cannot use any measurement tools, cannot touch any of the meat cuts and has no help from anyone else. Therefore, a student must be confident about his/her knowledge of the specifications and must rely on that confidence and previous training in order to be successful in a contest specifications class. This confidence comes from being prepared and from practicing. One thing that is very helpful in teaching students to master the specifications class is to have them fabricate the meat cuts while adhering to the specifications.

Preparing for the specifications class in a meat judging contest can sometimes seem like an insurmountable task. However, the accomplishment of mastering the specifications class can be very rewarding. Students who study and practice to prepare themselves for the specifications class will not only learn much about the skeletal and muscular anatomy of meat animal carcasses, but also will learn a great deal about a very important every-day aspect of the meat industry.

As a coach of an intercollegiate meat judging team, you must be knowledgeable of the specifications and their interpretations. Often times as coaches, we forget a specification or interpretation. Using your specifications sheet and asking questions to make sure you have communicated the official to your judging team members is critical. It is of utmost importance to communicate the official to your students the first time and every time your team is practicing specifications to avoid confusion. Some interpretations can definitely cause confusion for beginning meat judges. Also, specifications and interpretations are often updated to reflect changes in the industry or allow for ease of interpretation. Therefore, all coaches need to be aware of current specifications and interpretations. Following are some of interpretations that are often forgotten or that are "tricky".

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107 – Rib, Oven Prepared

- Seven full ribs, which extend to the ventral edge, shall be present (20). [The existence of any partial rib is a defect.]

Sometimes students forget that a portion of a rib that attaches to the backbone and extends to the cut surface

if seven ribs were present would also constitute defect 20.

- To determine grade as specified cut must be displayed fat side up. Thus, if grade is specified to be USDA Choice, to determine if this is acceptable or unacceptable cut must be displayed fat side up. If displayed fat side down, would be assumed acceptable. (This interpretation applies to all specifications.)

112A – Ribeye Roll, Lip-on

- Intercostal meat (rib fingers) shall be removed over the major muscles flush to the boned surface. However, over the tail of the ribeye roll, rib fingers do not have to be removed.
- Defect 14 can be called for extra muscles and missing muscles. Defect 14 would be called for extra muscles only for the cap muscle and rib fingers. Defect 14 would be called when the *spinalis dorsi* present on loin end, *complexus* on the blade end and the *multifidus dorsi* when bone side up.
- Exterior fat shall be removed, but fat beneath the grading ink is not considered for fat requirements. If the fat pad is larger than 3 square inches, exterior fat is a defect regardless of grade as specified or ink present.

120 – Brisket, Boneless, Deckle Off

- Hard fat along the sternum edge shall be trimmed level with the boned surface of the brisket. Hard fat must taper level with the boned surface.
- The brisket is cut initially as a bone-in cut; that is why often the brisket appears slightly off perpendicular when the deckle is removed. Students need to be cautious that perpendicular defect on the brisket will be extremely obvious. Note in the official specifications, it reads “approximately perpendicular”.

170 – Bottom (Gooseneck) Round

- Shank shall be removed at the natural seam between the shank and the heel. No shank shall be left on the heel; the heel shall not be scored and must be present.
- When the top round is removed from the bottom round, no *semimembranosus* shall be attached to the bottom round, other muscles from the top round that remain on the bottom round are not considered a defect.

180 – Strip Loin, Short-Cut, Boneless

- All bones and cartilage shall be removed; this excludes the hip bone (2 different defects). It is important from students to understand the location of the hip bone as the strip loin gets longer to differentiate between the hip bone and bone.
- One rib bone would result in defect 1, but not defect 19 if there were no other rib marks. Two or more rib bones would result in defect 1 and 19.

184 – Top Sirloin Butt

- The bottom sirloin side shall be removed by a cut starting at the natural seam between the *rectus femoris* and the *vastus lateralis*. (A portion of the *vastus lateralis* and *tensor fascia latae* may remain on the top sirloin.)

189 – Full Tenderloin

- Split tails in the *psoas minor* do not result in a defect.
- Lymph glands other than the large lymph gland are on the tenderloin. The large gland must be exposed. The others do not result in a defect either way.

204 – Rib Rack

- Eight ribs attached to the backbone and extending to the breast edge shall be present on each half. If a ninth rib is present but does not extend to the edge, no defect.
- Hanging tender will never be present on the rib rack so do not confuse with muscles on the blade end of the rack.
- The blade end of the rib rack must be perpendicular to the backbone. This call often confuses students because the angle of the backbone on this cut.

207 – Square-Cut Shoulder, Single

- Blade end shall be cut between the 4th and 5th ribs with at least a portion of the 4th rib extending to the ventral surface. Cut must originate between the 4th and 5th ribs on the dorsal side. The 4th rib may be scored and part of the 5th rib may be present but neither at the origination point.

232 – Loin, Trimmed

- Kidney and lumbar fat shall be trimmed to 0.5 inch to a point not beyond 75 percent of the length of the loin, but fat does not have to taper. Lumbar fat should be measured over the tenderloins. All other fat measurements along the loin should be considered from the point of the loin where they lay.

233A – Leg, Lower Shank Off, Single

- Perpendicular defects associated with the leg often confuse students. When the leg is cut from the loin and split, the flank portion and the other muscles do not have the bone structure to hold them in place any longer. Students must use the cut surface of the *longissimus dorsi* and the shank to determine perpendicular.
- Note it is important to show students several legs removed from the loin to far anterior and posterior in order for students to understand the location of hip bone, *gluteus medius* and the *longissimus dorsi*. Often students have not seen legs that are removed so far posterior that

the *longissimus dorsi* is no longer present and confuse the hip bone with vertebra.

401 – Ham, Regular

- Flank muscle (*rectus abdominus* only) shall be removed.
- Removal of lymph glands and associated fat does not result in ham collar not being well rounded.

406 – Pork Shoulder, Boston Butt (bone-in)

- Jowl shall be removed by a straight cut parallel to the loin side, leaving not more than 1 inch of jowl anterior to the *pectorals profundus* (crescent muscle) muscle.
- Fat on the skinned surface shall not exceed 0.25 inch in depth (do not get confused with seam fat on the jowl side).

408 – Pork Belly

- The dorsal edge shall be perpendicular to the ham and shoulder ends. There is often confusion between perpendicular and straight on the dorsal edge.

410 – Loin

- Belly side shall be removed immediately ventral to the major tenderloin muscle but not scoring the muscle.
- No part of the 2nd sacral vertebra shall be missing and no more than 4 sacral vertebra shall be present. No portion of the 1st caudal (5th vertebra) shall be present.

Perpendicular

If the specification reads that cut should be perpendicular with the length of the cut or the long axis, cut must be perpendicular in all directions. However, if specification reads that the cut should be perpendicular to the split surface of the backbone, cut only needs to be perpendicular in one direction. Also, some cuts only need to follow the natural curvature of the rib.

Specifications are worth 100 points per person (400 points/team). Even though this is a small portion of the total contest points, it is critical that students memorize and understand the specifications, because specifications can often determine the outcome of a contest. As a coach, know the official, explain to students why IMPS are important to the meat industry and build students' confidence.