



Food Alliance rolls out new grass-fed meat certification program

Producers must also meet the group's signature standards

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Sustainable agriculture certifier Food Alliance said Thursday two California ranches have been certified under the nonprofit's newly published national certification standard for grass-fed cattle, sheep and goats.

The two newly certified beef operations are Hearst Ranch Beef, a 150,000-acre ranching operation on California's central coast, and the TomKat Ranch, a smaller, direct market beef producer in Pescadero, Calif.

"Raising free-range grass-fed beef isn't just about what animals eat," Hearst Ranch Beef division manager Brian Kenny. "Food Alliance is the only certification program that covers the feed issue, labor conditions, humane animal care, and environmental concerns."

The Portland, Ore.-based group said the new standard requires that animals be raised on pasture or range, where they can browse on an exclusive diet of grass and forage plants.

Animals may not be fed grain or grain by-products, or receive hormone or antibiotic treatments of any kind.

Producers must also meet the group's signature standards for humane animal care, safe and fair working conditions, soil and water conservation, and protection of wildlife habitat.

In addition to the two California ranches, Food Alliance is processing applications for grass-fed certification from farms in New York, Pennsylvania and other states.

"We're seeing rapidly growing interest in developing certified grassfed products," said Food Alliance executive director Scott Exo, "and producers who have been doing things right want a tool that sets their products apart from those bearing unsubstantiated marketing claims."

Food Alliance's new grass-fed certification standards and related audit protocols have been reviewed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service, and were found to meet or exceed USDA requirements for labeling of grass-fed meat.

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