

Sustainable Industries

Food Alliance certifies grass-fed status

by Charles Redell - 5.20.09

PORTLAND

The non-profit Portland-based Food Alliance announced in May a new endorsement that cattle, sheep and goat operations can add to their Food Alliance certifications. The new **Food Alliance endorsement certifies the animals' status as grass-fed.**

The standard requires 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 byproducts or receive hormone or antibiotic treatments of any kind. In addition, ranches need to meet all the other requirements of Food Alliance certification.



Food Alliance created the grass-fed endorsement to satisfy what Scott Exo, its executive director, says he thinks is an unsatisfied consumer demand. Earlier this year, the U.S. **Department of Agriculture released rules for defining grass-fed animals** that only covers what the animals are fed, he explains.

"We believe fairly strongly that consumers don't neatly disaggregate all the attributes of a product," he says. "If they're buying a grass-fed product, they also want a product that is hormone- and antibiotic-free."

Two ranches have already received the endorsement: Hearst Ranch Beef, a 150,000-acre, 3,500-head cattle ranching operation on California's central coast, and the TomKat Ranch, a smaller, direct market beef producer in Pescadero, California. Another six are in the certification pipeline.

Getting the certification was a pragmatic step for Hearst, according to Brian Kenny, Hearst Ranch division manager for the Hearst Corporation.

"Grass-fed production is the antithesis of efficient," he says. "Every time we do one of these audits we find things that help our processes and clarify our thinking."

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