



# Growing to Standard PRODUCER TIPS

June 2018



## What is “Growing to Standard”?

“Growing to standard” is when a producer adopts specific production practices to produce a finished animal for processing that can result in higher quality meat and marketing opportunities. There are many standards, some are set by those marketing your meats, others are set by customer demand and when implemented can expand your market base and diversify market streams. Standards give customers assurance and confidence in your on-farm practices, slaughter and processing practices, and ethics.

Standards are like a guarantee for customers and those selling your meats, they de-mystify concerns and gives confidence and assurance in how the animal lived and how the meat was created.

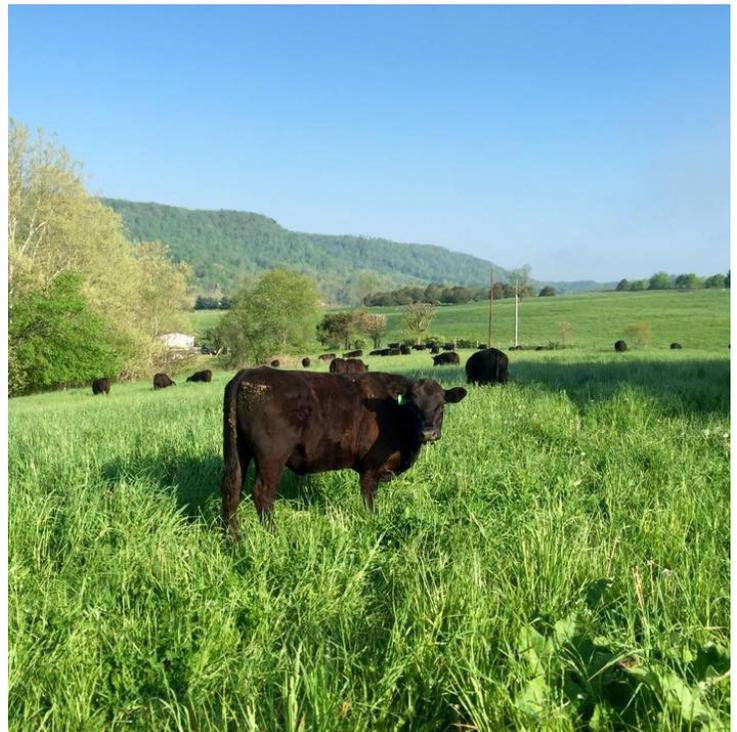
## Quality and Consistency

The quality of the meat you produce is one of the most important factors in a livestock farmer’s economic success. Meeting customer’s expectations and providing product consistency is critical for maintaining a steady repeat customer base. A meat lacking in consistent quality, texture and taste is a guarantee for failure.

### Consistency in breeding and growing

Herd and land management practices are key in meat production. Genetics, herd success, culling and land management all contribute to a more consistent carcass quality. Following a standard of production practices develops a consistent product for the market.

Delivering repeat performance of meat texture, taste and quality is imperative to success while building consumer confidence and assurance.



Swift Level Fine Meats cattle , Lewisburg WV.

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## Quality/consistency in processing

Most standards include specific slaughter and processing practices. Processing practices are just as important to producing a quality product as the production practices. The care and skill taken during processing have a significant impact on the meat itself.

Slaughter, appropriate hang time, carcass break down and cut are key outcomes in quality of product. The best carcass is at the mercy of the one who wields the knife. A good butcher will give you feedback on your carcasses. Know the inside of your animal as well as the outside. If you are in the meat business, know the meat. You need to know the entire process, to determine if your practices are resulting in success or not.

Using a well skilled and knowledgeable processor who understands “market meat cuts” is imperative. Researching the processor that best fits your customer’s demand for cuts is important for a successful business. It may be worth it to haul further for quality product.



Credit: Swift Level Fine Meats

## Economic Benefits of incorporating and using standards

Building a stronger customer base through assurance and confidence creates a demand product with more return and the ability to expand meat production. Know your market and grow for that, when shopping, you want to pick what you want, selling meat puts the customer in front of you, give them selection that fits your demographic. A quality carcass cut right will create a return customer base. Understanding the cost of your animal and meat is part of the business plan and budget. Then one can see the profit and build towards that.

Meeting the standard. A well cut meat product is the first bite in sales. A good textured, tasting, and quality cut meat creates repeat business and return customers. The best ideas and animal performance is at risk if a good processor is not in part of the equation. Processing is a very important step between producer and client. No matter how well cut, if the taste and texture are not there, business stops.

Know your meats, what is being created, farm to fork requires extensive knowledge. Working with your processor is a critically important relationship. Both the producer and processor should understand and know the market customer. Poor quality meat will financially run a producer in the ground.

The benefits of processing standards build confidence and assurance with your practices. A good business plan and informed budget, no matter how small an operation, will help define the destination of your animals for slaughter and processing

## Additional reasons to “Grow to standard”

Standards shape genetics, land use practices, herd and land management. Knowing the meat quality outcomes affords the producer the ability to make informed management decisions. With knowledge of the herd and land, our animals and land can be healthier, which eliminates stress on both. Striving towards a good, healthy standard and following one, creates a day to day consistency that follows through to the meat.

### Benefit for animals

Consistent care and management with intended outcomes provides an environment of safety and support, which most domestic creatures respond to. With a followed standard, daily management brings more producer awareness to the overall project and the animals. Less stress can certainly contribute to consistent weight gain and a well toned carcass.

### Environmental Benefits

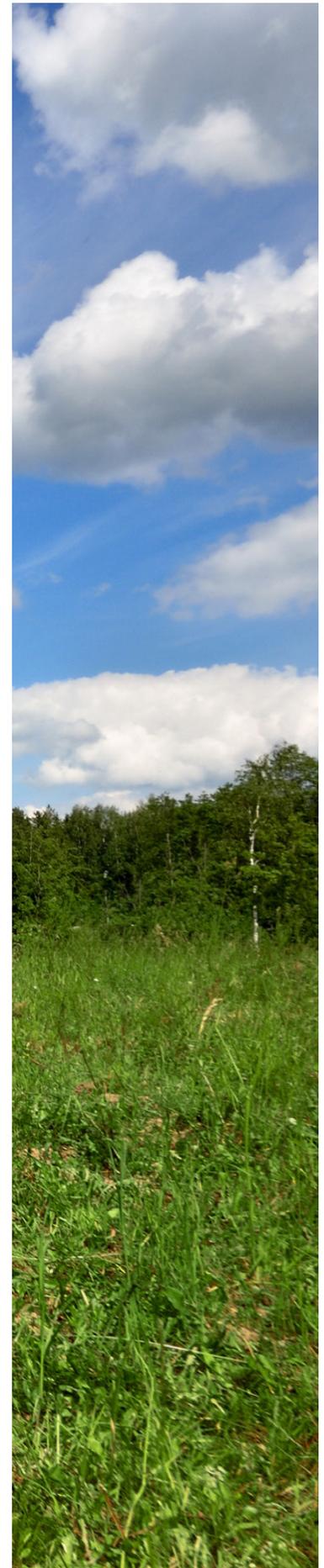
Standards include land use management which has direct impact on the environment. Poorly treated land cannot sustain healthy animals. The incentive to improve soil, forage and water quality provides direct outcomes that impact the entire farm.

This is the first step in the process, without healthy soils, forages, water and conservation measures, developing healthy animals for meat will be a costly challenge. The relationship and care of the land is synonymous with husbandry in most standards of stewardship, personally or managed. The care of the land and its health are very telling of the rest of the story.

Some examples of national standard organizations that producers could work with that could be part of a production standard are listed below in the Resources section.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPANSION

Growing to standards set by successful associations or independent producers can assist production in its most unique ways, independent niche meat production or groups striving for a consolidated branded product. When a product is identified by its quality and consistency, market share and customer awareness can boost sales. When striving for a more competitive market, the consistent product has an edge to hold its own, and is more attractive to buyers, direct, retail and wholesale.



## How can I start looking at growing to standard?

### STEPS:

1. Educate yourself on standards being used across the country specific to your species and region for land use practices. Resources in Section 3.
2. Ask your customers and future customers what standards are important to them.
  - > If selling at a farm market, ask the market manager to supply customers with a handout of questions to survey those customers.
  - > If selling direct or custom, ask your customers, let them know you are producing for them, show them what they feel is important to you.
3. Determine if there is an existing standard you could follow (See Resources Below)

### Things to Consider:

- Production practices can be unique, find what fits best for your life, holistically.
- Production process may require additional capital, know your budget, business plan, goals and projected outcomes leading you to actual outcomes and business strength.
- Use standards that benefit you, your lifestyle and that your customers/markets are asking for.
- Growing to standards, whether your own personal mission statement standard or the standard of others, will contribute to consistency, good or not, of quality, good or not, understand goals and outcomes.
- Am I producing a product with similarities and branding for scaled marketing or an independent producer of specific meat products
- Why am I doing this?

### National resources:

- American Grassfed Association AGA
- Organic Valley
- Certified Naturally Grown
- Niche Meat Processors Assistance Network NMPAN
- NC Choices Meat Conference
- Animal Welfare Approved AWA
- White Oak Pastures
- Savory Institute
- American Grazing Lands
- Ray Archuleta

### Local Resources:

- WVU Extension Calf Pooling
- Organic Valley
- Greenbrier Valley Grown
- Swift Level Fine Meats

### Examples of cooperative grown to standard organizations:

- Organic Valley
- First Hand Foods
- Adirondack Grazers
- North Cascades Meat
- Vermont Packinghouse
- Porter Road