

Overview of the *DFC National Standard for the Production of Milk from Grass-Fed Cows*

The *DFC National Standard for the Production of Milk from Grass-Fed Cows* is a voluntary program for the certification of milk produced from grass-fed cows in Canada.

Dairy Farmers of Canada oversees the implementation of the national standard and its operating guidelines. DFC also manages the relationship with certification bodies and regulates the use of a grass-fed certification mark.

The program was developed in conjunction with provincial association members and external stakeholders. Participating provincial associations are responsible for administering transportation, sampling and testing of milk¹, logistics and pricing².

Dairy Farmers of Canada has entered into agreements with the certification bodies, which are authorized to certify farms that meet, and continue to meet, the requirements set out in the *DFC National Standard for the Production of Milk from Grass-Fed Cows*.

¹ Associated costs to be paid by producers/processors

² In Quebec, the responsibilities of the Provincial Association (PLQ) are subject to individual Sales Agreements with processors

How the Program Works for Farmers



Farmers willing to produce milk from grass-fed cows must first contact their provincial board to ensure there is a demand. Then, after consulting the DFC website to obtain information on the program, Canadian farmers interested in becoming certified need to contact one of the approved certification bodies to begin the application process.



The certification bodies will ask the farmer to complete an application form and provide supporting documents, which could include a Pasture Management Plan and a Feeding Protocol Plan. The body will review the documents to ensure that the farm has the capacity to meet the requirements of the *DFC National Standard for the Production of Milk from Grass-Fed Cows*.



If the documents are deemed satisfactory, the certification body will schedule an on-farm inspection to ensure the farm operations match what was indicated in the application form and the supporting documents.



If the farm passes the on-farm inspection, the application will be forwarded to the appropriate provincial association. This association will then send the collected samples of milk to a lab to verify that the biomarker levels are met. These biomarkers need to be met on two (2) consecutive bulk tank samples.



If the two consecutive milk samples meet the required biomarker levels, the certification body will issue a certificate to certify the farm under the *DFC National Standard for the Production of Milk from Grass-Fed Cows*. The certification remains valid unless suspended or cancelled for non-conformity.



Certified farms are subject to at least one (1) annual on-farm and document audit per calendar year. Certified farms could also be subject to an additional unannounced inspection once per calendar year.



Participating provincial associations will continue to test milk samples collected from certified grass-fed farms at least six (6) times per calendar year to ensure biomarker levels are met in the milk. If the biomarker levels are not met, this could result in an additional audit by the certification body.



Farmers have up to 90 days to address any non-conformities found during an audit. During this period, grass-fed certification is suspended and milk will not be accepted by the provincial association as grass-fed. Once the certification body conducts a follow-up visit to and confirms that the situation has been fixed, the milk can resume being sold as grass-fed. If non-conformity is not addressed within 90 days, grass-fed certification will be cancelled and the farmer will have to re-apply for certification.

Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) National Standard for the Production of Milk from Grass-Fed Cows



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DFC National Standard for the Production of Milk from Grass-Fed Cows
(“Standard”)

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1. Introduction

Milk from Grass-Fed Cows refers to milk produced from cows fed a diet consisting primarily of forage/grass.

Efficient grass-fed farming requires a high forage diet with as much fresh grass as possible with limited amount of concentrates, considering limitations imposed by climate and other environmental factors and dairy cows' nutritional needs. Cows in early lactation may need more concentrates than cows in mid-lactation, and cows in late lactation may not need to be fed any concentrates. For this reason, managing a grass-fed operation requires commitment to the operation and to grass-fed principles.

This Standard sets out the requirements for farms to be certified as "Grass-fed" under Dairy Farmers of Canada's (DFC) certification program. This Standard does not address the healthfulness, safety, nutrition or animal welfare associated with Milk from Grass-Fed Cows production and/or products derived from Milk from Grass-Fed Cows.

DFC envisions that the Standard will be reviewed periodically to ensure it meets the need of current market conditions.

2. Scope

This Standard applies to licensed Canadian dairy farmers ("Farmers") who meet all the requirements of proAction® who desire to be certified under the DFC grass-fed certification program.

3. Definitions

For the purpose of this Standard:

- 3.1. **Administrator** means DFC or a third party authorized by DFC to administer the Standard on its behalf;
- 3.2. **Certification** means written assurance from a CB that the Farm is producing Milk from Grass-Fed Cows in accordance with the Standard. Certification of Farms may be based on a range of inspection activities including verification of management practices, reviewing documents, milk sample testing, and Auditing of quality assurance systems;
- 3.3. **Certification Body (CB)** means (a) third party administrator(s) jointly approved by the Dairy Farmers of Canada ("DFC") and provincial Boards, responsible for the administration, audit, and verification of compliance to the Standard;
- 3.4. **Diet** means the feed regularly offered to, or consumed by, an animal;
- 3.5. **Farm** means licensed Canadian Dairy Farm(s), who meet all the requirements of proAction®;
- 3.6. **Farmer** means a licensed operator of a licensed Farm who meet all the requirements of proAction®;

- 3.7. Feeding Protocol** means a record and/or plan of the type and proportion of feed fed to the lactating herd of a Farm;
- 3.8. Forage(s)** mean(s) the edible vegetative parts of plants, other than separated grains, that can provide feed for grazing animals, or that can be harvested for feeding.
- 3.9. Grain** means seed from cereal plants, caryopsis. Corn, wheat, rye, oats, rice, millet, sorghum, barley, and triticale;
- 3.10. Grass(es)** mean(s) perennial and annual grasses, forbs, legumes, brassicas, browse and post-harvest crop residue without grain;
- 3.11. Graze or Grazing** means the consumption of standing Forage by livestock or to put livestock to feed on standing Forage;
- 3.12. Grazing Season** means the period when pasture is available for grazing, due to natural precipitation or irrigation;
- 3.13. Guidelines** means the DFC National Standard for the Production of Milk from Grass-Fed Cows Operating Guidelines, developed by DFC;
- 3.14. Mineral** means (a) a solid homogeneous crystalline chemical element or compound that results from the inorganic processes of nature, (b) any of the various naturally occurring homogeneous substances obtained usually from the ground; or (c) a synthetic substance having the chemical composition and crystalline form and properties of a naturally occurring mineral;
- 3.15. Non-Grazing Season** means the period when Pasture is not available for Grazing;
- 3.16. Pasture** means (a) Forages harvested by grazing animals or (b) an area of land with 75% Forage cover or unbroken land;
- 3.17. Pasture Management Plan** means a document outlining the process that will ensure the growth of healthy grass and related plants to sustain dairy production while ensuring ecological health;
- 3.18. Ruminant Nutritionist** means a person who is trained to formulate feed rations for cattle;
- 3.19. Separated Grain** means Grain detached from cereal crop plants;
- 3.20. Silage** means Forage preserved in a succulent condition by partial anaerobic, acid fermentation;
- 3.21. Standing Forage** means Forage found in its natural state (i.e. not harvested);
- 3.22. Supplement** means a nutritional additive (salt, protein, phosphorus, etc.) intended to improve the nutritional balance and remedy deficiencies of the Diet;
- 3.23. Vegetative** means non-reproductive plant parts, (leaf and stem) in developmental stages of plant growth;
- 3.24. Vegetative State/Stage** means a stage in cereal plant growth at which the plant contains non-reproductive plant parts (leaf and stem), and is still in the developmental stages of plant growth;

and

- 3.25. Vitamin** means any of various organic substances essential in minute quantities to the nutrition of most animals and some plants that act especially as coenzymes and precursors of coenzymes in regulating of metabolic processes.

4. Requirements

In order to be certified as “grass-fed” under this Standard, Farms must meet the following requirements:

4.1. Feeding Protocol

(a) Diet for Cows

- I. At least 75% of the total dry matter intake (DMI) of the lactating herd must consist of Forage or Grass, in all time, including during the winter period.
- II. Subject to paragraph 4.1 (a) I, up to 25% of the total dry matter intake of the lactating herd may consist of Grains and Supplements, including corn silage*. This percentage can increase to a maximum of 30% of the total dry matter intake with a written recommendation from a Ruminant Nutritionist or the herd veterinarian.
- III. Mineral and Vitamin Supplements may be provided as needed (e.g. as recommended by the manufacturer, a veterinarian or Ruminant Nutritionist) with the exception of Mineral and Vitamin Supplements containing feed listed in paragraph 4.1 (b).

* *Corn silage is considered 50/50 forage to grain, unless otherwise shown with lab analysis*

(b) Prohibited Feed

The lactating herd of a Farm cannot be fed the following:

- I. Corn distiller Grains;
- II. Any type of plant oils/fats;
- III. Animal oils/fats/by-products;
- IV. Full-fat oil seeds (except canola seeds, and solvent extracted meal of seeds, which are permitted);
- V. Linseed (flaxseed) above 1 kg per day; and
- VI. Fishmeal, urea or any other non-protein nitrogen supplements.

4.2. Pasture Management and Grazing

- (a) All dairy cows in the lactating herd must have access to Pasture at least 120 days a year, for 6 hours per day during the Grazing Season. In regions where the Grazing Season is less than 120 days, cows must have access to Pasture for at least 6 hours per day whenever weather conditions permit.
- (b) Pasture must be managed in a way that will not degrade the soil or quality of the Pasture and natural resources with the exception of having a Sacrifice area during the Non-Grazing Season.
- (c) The Grazing area must be greater than 0.13 hectare (0.33 acre) per animal unit.
- (d) A Pasture Management Plan must be in place to demonstrate that Pasture is being managed as a crop and is being rotated to allow for proper rest and regrowth of the Pasture before the animals are reintroduced to the area.

4.3. Animal Health and Welfare

Farmers must be in compliance the Canadian Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cows (Code of Practice). Compliance with the Code of Practice will be validated through proAction®.

4.4. Transport and Handling

Milk from Grass-Fed Cows must be processed, stored, and transported separately from any other type of milk at all times, to avoid comingling.

5. Record Keeping and Identification

- (a) The Farmer must keep detailed records and relevant supporting documentation such as, but not limited to, Pasture Management Plans, Feeding Protocol, etc. to demonstrate full compliance with this Standard. These records must be made available to the CB.
- (b) Records must make it possible to trace:
 - I. The amount and type of Forage/Grass, Grains and Supplements, Minerals and Vitamins provided to cows used in Milk from Grass-Fed Cows production;
 - II. The number of days and hours cows were given access to Pasture during the Grazing Season;
 - III. Pasture management;
 - IV. Biomarker test results; and
 - V. Any other activities that demonstrate compliance with this Standard.
- (c) Records must be kept on a daily basis and must be kept for a minimum of five years after creation.

6. Auditing and Verification

- (a) Once certified under this Standard, the Farm will be audited by the CB at least once per calendar year to maintain Certification, as set out in the Guidelines. As part of the audit, the Farmer must demonstrate that they are operating in accordance with all the requirements identified in the Standard.
- (b) The Farmer must provide the appropriate records specified in Section 5 for validation by the CB and undergo an on-site inspection.
- (c) As part of the audit, the CB may outline a corrective action plan and subsequent follow-up audits. While implementing a corrective action plan, Certification will be suspended, and milk cannot be sold as “grass-fed”. If corrective action is not implemented within 90 days of receipt of a report indicating non-compliance with the Standard from the CB, certification will be cancelled, and farms will have to reapply for Certification as per the Guidelines.
- (d) In addition to the annual audit, the farmer must demonstrate that the following biomarkers are met in the Milk from Grass-Fed Cows on bulk tank samples collected at a minimum of 6 times per calendar year, every two months:
 - I. The 18:2 n-6/18:3 n-3 ratio in Milk from Grass-Fed Cows is less than or equal to 3.5 for the first 12 months on the program, and less than or equal to 3.0 thereafter*. A deviation of up to +0.5 in the 18:2 n-6/18:3 n-3 ratio is acceptable for the first test.
 - II. In the event of non compliance with Section 6.d.i. of the Standard, the CB shall proceed with a document review, as set out in Paragraph 2.2.1.2. of the Guidelines and/or an additional on-site inspection to verify Compliance with the Standard.

**These targets are subject to change pending analysis on seasonal variances in biomarkers.*

7. Pre-conditions/Transition

- (a) Prior to being certified under this Standard, Farmers must, at a minimum:
 - I. Submit an application form, as well as a Pasture Management Plan, Feeding Protocol, and any other documents required by the CB or indicated in the Guidelines. These documents will be validated to ensure the Farm can meet the requirements outlined in Section 1 of this Standard to the Certification Body for approval;
 - II. Undergo an on-site inspection conducted by the Certification Body to validate information provided in the application form, Pasture Management Plan and Feeding Protocol, and to assess the Farm’s ability to comply with the terms of this Standard; and
 - III. Demonstrate that the biomarkers specified in paragraph 6. (d) have been met in the

milk on two (2) consecutive bulk tank samples.

All as more particularly set out in the Guidelines.

8. Guidelines

The Administrator may establish Guidelines to set out, among others, the application process for Certification, the audit requirements and process, a complaint process, as well as the accreditation process for CBs.