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Clarification on the Use of Pasture in Combination with a Lot¹ for Step 4 Systems

When GAP originally developed the 5-Step Animal Welfare Rating Standards for Beef Cattle, there were no cattle being finished on grain rations in a pasture setting. However, this type of system now exists, and clarification has been requested around the use of pasture in combination with a lot and meeting Step 4 requirements. The following clarification addresses this request.

Operations that intend to use pasture in combination with a lot (including using the lot seasonally or year round) are only eligible for Step 4 certification if all of the following criteria are met:

- 1) Per Standard 7.1.3, pasture must be maintained at a minimum of 50% vegetative cover throughout the year;
- 2) Operations may keep cattle in a lot but must provide unrestricted pasture access;
- 3) The lot area must not exceed 10% of the area available to cattle at any one time;
- 4) The lot area must provide at least 250 sq ft per animal;
- 5) The lot area must have a dry mound or be bedded so all animals can get out of the mud. This will be assessed by a mud score (see bullet 6 below); AND
- 6) 75% of the cattle must have a mud score of 2 or less (see attached Appendix A: Mud Score)

Cattle may only be restricted from accessing pasture per the requirements laid out in Standard 7.1.2 for a maximum of 4 months per year per Standard 7.1.1. Restricted access to pasture must be justified to the auditor and records for each group of cattle must be kept of when animals were restricted access.

Example 1: Rancher A has 174 head in a 1-acre lot. The lot is surrounded by 9 acres of pasture and rangeland that is directly accessible to the cattle by a series of fences and gates. Each pasture has at least 50% vegetative cover. The lot has a bedded pack large enough for all animals to lie down, and 5 animals have a mud score >2. This operation is in compliance.

NOTE – GAP understands that pasture quality varies from region to region so in this example, while 174 head on 9 acres might work, this area may not support cattle in compliance with the standards in another geographic area. The percent vegetative cover is used to measure this.

Example 2: Rancher B has 500 acres that they use in 50-acre rotational blocks. Five (5) of the blocks have access to the lot, and 5 do not have access. As long as the lot is not greater than 5 acres, and meets the conditions above, this operation is in compliance.

¹ A lot is defined as a dirt pen with no growing vegetation. While a lot is usually associated with no access to pasture, lots may be included in systems where cattle do have access to pasture at Step 4 (but not at Steps 5 and 5+).

APPENDIX A:

Mud Scoring

Mud scoring is an indicator of bedding/flooring/pasture condition; highlighting wet, excessively dirty or a poorly maintained cattle environment.



1 Clean with little soiling
on hooves/fetlocks



2 Fecal/dirt
clumps on legs



3 Fecal/dirt clumps on
legs and belly



4 Fecal/dirt clumps on
legs, sides and belly