

Lamb Quality Grades

USDA quality grades predicts flavor, juiciness and tenderness of the final product. Quality grades for lamb (and mutton) are Prime, Choice, Good, Utility, and Cull. Each quality grade is further divided into thirds. Most lamb carcasses grade Prime or Choice. Lamb carcasses that do not qualify for the Choice grade are commonly referred to as “no rolls.” They are usually from lightweight, under finished lambs. The factors used to determine quality grade are maturity, flank streaking, and conformation.



“Break Joint”



“Spool Joint”

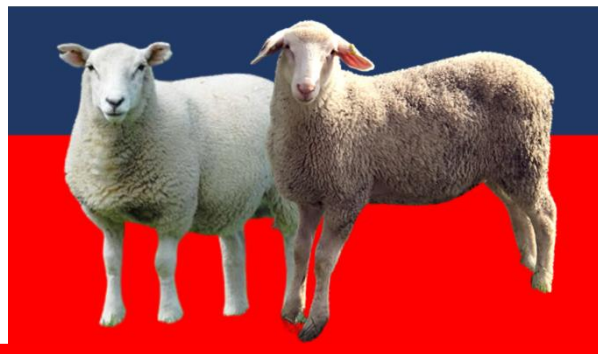
The maturity of lamb carcasses is based on the presence of break or spool joints on the front shanks (cannon bone area). Lamb carcasses must have break joints (moderately red, moist and porous), whereas mutton carcasses have spool (ossified) joints.



Marbling is the small specs of fat found within the ribeye. Since lamb carcasses are not usually ribbed, flank steaking is used to estimate marbling. Flank streakings are the fat deposits on the flank muscles.



Conformation is determined primarily by leg score.



Prime lambs tend to be thickly muscled throughout and moderately wide and thick in relation to their length. They have a Small amount of flank streaking and a slightly dark pink color on the inside flanks and ribeye.



Choice lambs tend to be slightly thickly muscled throughout and tend to be slightly wide and thick in relation to their length. They have at least Traces amount of flank streaking and a moderately dark pink color on the inside flanks and ribeye.