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# Poultry

## Buying Guides for Consumers



Home and Garden Bulletin No. 34

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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## When You Buy Poultry—

- Choose the kind — chicken, turkey, duck, goose, guinea, squab.
- Select the “class.” Remember that poultry classes within each kind are based on age, weight, and sex, and therefore are related to tenderness and suitable methods of cooking. Examples of classes of chickens in retail markets are: Broilers or Fryers, Roasters, Capons, and Stewing Chickens (also called Hens or Fowl). Turkeys are classed as Fryers or Roasters (young turkeys usually under 16 weeks of age; sometimes sold as turkey broilers); Young Hen Turkeys and Young Tom Turkeys (the usual age and size for roasting); Hen Turkeys and Tom Turkeys (older, coarser-meated birds). Ducks are classed as Broiler or Fryer Ducklings; Roaster Ducklings; and Mature (Old) Ducks. Geese are classed as Young Geese and Mature (Old) Geese.
- Read ALL label information. Look for the official grade mark—“U. S. Grade A,” “U. S. Grade B,” or “U. S. Grade C”—and for the official inspection mark—“Inspected for Wholesomeness by U. S. Department of Agriculture.” Some poultry is inspected only, some is both graded and inspected, and some is neither graded nor inspected, therefore it is important to study all the labels. Look for trade marks, brand names, and information about style of processing, kind and class of bird, and the weight and price.
- Remember that the GRADE mark refers to quality (“meatiness,” shape, amount of fat, and general appearance), whereas the INSPECTION mark refers to the bird’s fitness for food.
- Select the form you prefer—whole or cut up, or selected parts; frozen or freshly drawn; packaged or not packaged.
- Consider style of processing—READY TO COOK or DRESSED—in relation to price. (See information on p. 8.)
- Remember that READY-TO-COOK poultry has been bled, picked, and fully drawn (eviscerated)—the head, feet, and inedible organs were removed before the bird was weighed for pricing. Poultry labeled “Ready to Cook” should have been thoroughly cleaned inside and out, and should be free of pinfeathers. The giblets (liver, gizzard, and heart) have been washed, trimmed, and wrapped, and usually have been placed inside the body cavity if a ready-to-cook bird is to be sold whole. The neck may be packaged with the giblets.
- Bear in mind that DRESSED poultry includes removable waste in the form of the head, feet, and viscera. Consider that you pay for this waste because, when a dressed bird is weighed for pricing, it has had ONLY the blood and feathers removed.
- Remember that you have bought a perishable food. Store fresh-killed, freshly drawn, or cooked poultry in refrigerator, loosely covered, preferably at 35° to 38° F. (Remove cellophane or film wrap from unfrozen poultry before placing in refrigerator, loosely wrapped.) Use within 2 or 3 days. To hold raw or cooked poultry longer, freeze it, after wrapping properly to prevent drying out. When you buy frozen, ready-to-cook poultry, store it in a freezer or the freezer compartment of refrigerator while it is still hard frozen. Properly packaged, quick-frozen poultry will retain its quality for several months at a temperature of 0° F., or lower.
- Be assured that the more often you ask your dealer for properly identified ready-to-cook poultry, the sooner it will be available to you and to consumers everywhere.

Production and Marketing Administration  
Poultry Branch

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
June 1953

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# Poultry—Buying Guides for Consumers

By Rowena S. Carpenter, home economist, and Alfred W. Otte, formerly marketing specialist, Poultry Branch, Production and Marketing Administration

## Official Grading and Inspection Programs

A quarter of a century ago, 1927, saw the small beginning of the present official grading and inspection programs for poultry. From that date on, the U. S. Department of Agriculture has considered the needs and problems of poultry producers and handlers, as well as the interests of consumers, in its work on poultry grading and inspection.

The standards for quality on which poultry grades are based have been improved. So have the grading and inspection programs. Sanitary requirements have been set up; they must be met by poultry processing plants that wish to use either the grading or the inspection programs of the U. S. D. A. In recent years special attention has been given to designs for poultry labels, to make them more helpful as buying guides for consumers.

The use of the official inspection and grading services for poultry is entirely voluntary on the part of industry. Since more and more processing plants are using one or both of these services, the quantity of ready-to-cook poultry that has been inspected, or both inspected and graded officially, is increasing steadily in retail markets. A ready-to-cook bird may be inspected and labeled as to wholesomeness **WITHOUT** being graded and labeled as to quality, but an individual bird may **NOT** be grade labeled unless it has been inspected. In view of these rules, the consumer may now find in her market ready-to-cook inspected poultry, and ready-to-cook inspected **AND** graded poultry.

Processing plants that use the Government poultry grading and inspection services are permitted to use the grade and inspection marks designed by the Department of Agriculture. These official marks are used, under the immediate supervision of official graders or inspectors, on commercial labels. The label may be a metal clip placed on the wing, or a paper tag or sticker, or the label information may be printed on the consumer package. Examples of labels are shown on the

next two pages. The designs for the official marks are shown below.

### The Inspection Mark—a Circle

The inspection mark may be used only on a ready-to-cook bird that has been examined by a Government inspector and passed as wholesome food. This mark denotes wholesomeness only—not grade (quality). It may be used without a grade mark.



### The Grade Mark—a Shield

The grade mark tells the quality (U. S. Grade A, B, or C), the style of processing (ready to cook), and the kind and class of poultry (for example, stewing chicken, young turkey). It also states that the product has been Government graded or Federal-State graded, and usually gives the number of the processing plant in which the grading was done.



A ready-to-cook bird may carry the grade mark **ONLY IF** it also carries the inspection mark, denoting wholesomeness.

### The Grade AND Inspection Mark

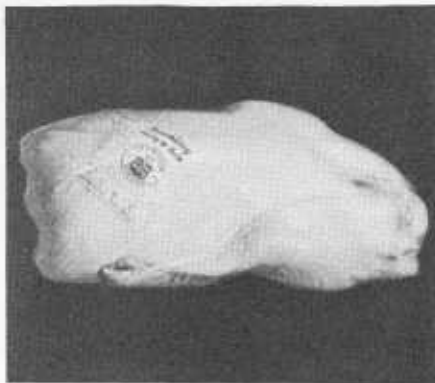
The combined grade and inspection mark (a shield within a circle) may be used only on a **READY-TO-COOK** bird that has been **BOTH** graded for quality **AND** inspected and passed as wholesome food.

The consumer who buys ready-to-cook poultry bearing this mark has chosen a high-quality, wholesome product which was processed under sanitary conditions.



# Styles of Packaging and Labeling

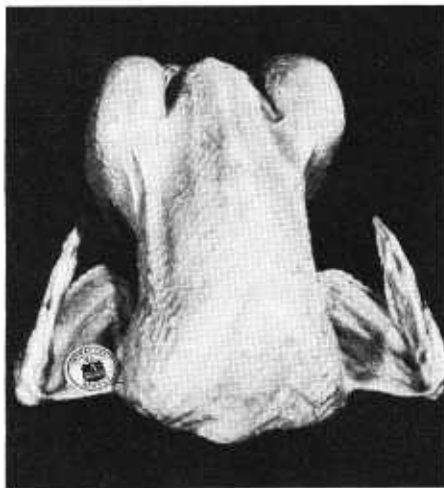
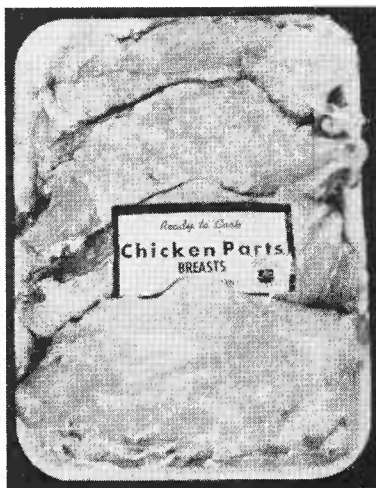
Inspected AND graded: Film-wrapped whole turkey and chicken; tray-packed chicken legs; wrapped duck; packaged frozen cut-up chicken.



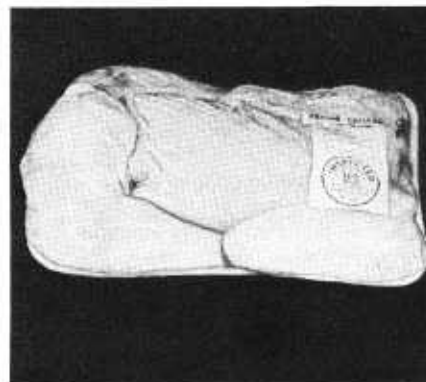
Wrapped poultry in refrigerated SELF-SERVICE case.

# Ready-to-Cook and Canned Poultry

Inspected AND Graded. OR Inspected Only: Tray-packed breasts, whole bird, wing clip label; canned chicken; tray-packed cut-up bird, frozen breasts.



Unwrapped poultry parts in refrigerated SERVICE case.



## What Do the Different Grades Mean?

The bird that carries an official grade mark has been examined for quality and then assigned a grade, U. S. Grade A, B, or C, according to Government standards. In judging quality, the grader considers the general condition and cleanliness of each bird, as well as the following individual factors: Shape or conformation of the bird, amount of fleshing or "meatiness," amount of fat distributed in and under the skin, and the absence or extent of bruises, tears, discolorations, and pinfeathers. Minimum standards for each of these factors have been set up for each of the three grades. A bird that falls short of the standards for any factor must be placed in a lower grade.

The grader also checks on the softness or firmness of the flesh and the texture of the skin. He may examine the tip of the breastbone to see if it is flexible or rigid.

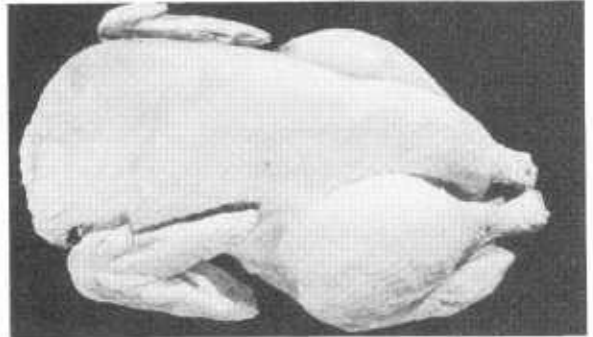
Within ANY grade, YOUNG birds (broilers, fryers, roasters) should be soft-meat, which indicates tenderness; the skin should be fine-textured and the tip of the breastbone should be flexible. In ANY grade, the OLDER birds (stewing chickens, mature turkeys) have less-tender flesh and coarser skin, and the tip of the breastbone is less flexible, becoming practically rigid in old birds.

Chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, guineas, and squabs all are graded by the same quality factors.

### Chickens Typical of the Three Grades

#### U. S. Grade A →

This stewing chicken of "A Quality" is well-fleshed, having a full breast and "meaty" legs. It has no defects, such as a crooked breastbone or broken bones. A good layer of fat is well distributed under the skin. The bird was well-bled and well-picked, and is free of pinfeathers. The skin has no tears or bruises.



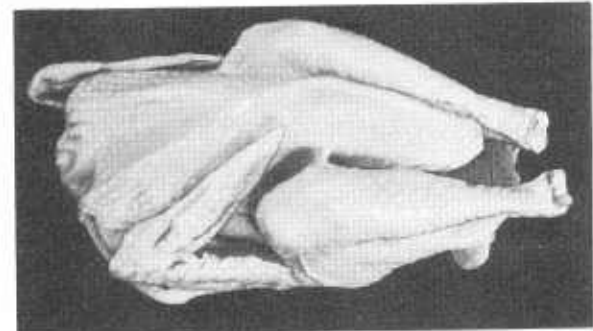
#### U. S. Grade B →

This stewing chicken of "B Quality" is fairly well-fleshed, and has a fair covering of fat. This bird was fairly well-bled and fairly well-picked; there are no pinfeathers; it has no deformities or broken bones, and no skin tears or bruises. (Minor deformities and minor tears or bruises are allowed in "B Quality" birds.)

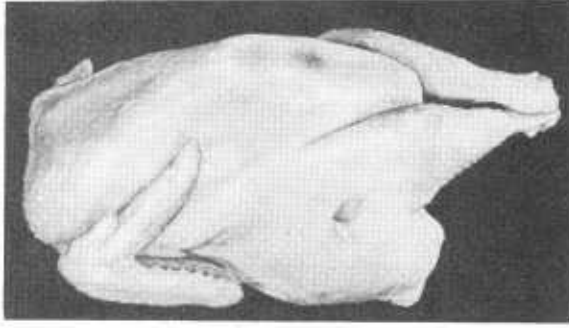


#### U. S. Grade C →

This stewing chicken of "C Quality" falls short of the standards for "B Quality" poultry in some respects. It is poorly fleshed and poorly covered with fat. (It could also have been poorly bled, poorly picked, and could have had minor skin tears or bruises, some deformities, or a broken bone, as these defects are allowed in "C Quality" poultry.)



## The Lower Grades Can Be Good Buys



← **U. S. Grade B**

Because of a skin tear, and discolorations due to abrasions and bruises, this stewing chicken was classed as U. S. Grade B. (In fleshing, shape, and amount of fat, it meets the minimum requirements for an "A Quality" bird.) Priced as Grade B, this meaty hen would be an excellent buy even with its skin tear and discolorations.



← **U. S. Grade C**

Because this stewing chicken has deformities—a crooked breastbone and crooked back—and numerous skin abrasions, it was classed as U. S. Grade C. (In fleshing and amount of fat, it meets the minimum requirements for a "B Quality" bird.) For the consumer who does not mind the deformities and defects, this hen, at Grade C price, would be a good buy.

## What Do the Sanitary Requirements Mean?

The sanitary requirements, which must be met by processing plants that make use of the U. S. D. A. poultry grading and inspection services (either service or both), are a protection to consumers. These requirements describe in detail the type of buildings, processing rooms, equipment, and utensils that will make for sanitary

processing, and prescribe that poultry shall be handled in a sanitary manner. The requirements deal also with the health and hygiene of employees. Therefore, poultry that bears either the official grade or the inspection mark has been handled under sanitary conditions during slaughtering, dressing, eviscerating, and packaging.

## What Does "Inspected for Wholesomeness" Mean?

A bird that carries the "Inspected for Wholesomeness" mark of the U. S. D. A. (a circle), has been examined by a Government inspector, who has found no evidence of conditions that might make the bird or its edible organs unfit for food. The inspection mark is placed **ONLY** on ready-to-cook poultry that has been fully drawn or eviscerated at a processing plant, as the inspector must examine the internal organs at the same time he examines the bird inside and out, in deciding on wholesomeness. Note that the inspection mark does not refer to quality in terms of grade; it is, however, an important protection to the consumer in denoting wholesomeness.



## Consumer Tips for Choosing Style of Processing

When you go to market, you may know that you want a chicken, a turkey, a duck, or a goose. You may know, too, that you want a frying, a roasting, or a stewing bird. But you may not have decided whether you will buy your poultry in ready-to-cook style (whole or cut up), or in dressed style. The following tips may help you evaluate price and other differences between the two styles:

(1) When you buy dressed poultry, you pay for removable waste. About  $\frac{1}{4}$  or more of the weight you pay for in a dressed chicken, and about  $\frac{1}{6}$  or more in a dressed turkey, is removed and discarded when the bird is drawn. For this reason you should pay considerably less PER POUND for dressed poultry than for poultry priced in ready-to-cook style.

(2) If you buy a dressed bird, you should jot down its weight, as well as the price per pound and the total price you pay before the bird is drawn. You should then find out the weight AFTER the bird is drawn. These figures will show you the cost of the DRAWN WEIGHT of the poultry you take home.

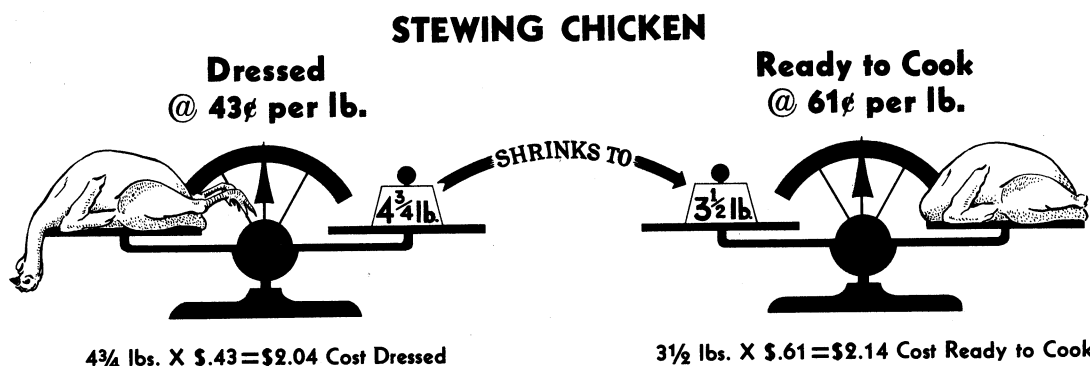
(3) Remember that a purchase of dressed poultry may require that you wait your turn to make your choice and wait also while the butcher draws the bird for you. Even then, you still have to spend time in your kitchen giving the drawn bird a thorough cleaning inside and out, which often includes removing lungs, windpipe, oil sac, and pinfeathers.

(4) When you buy ready-to-cook birds, consider

the shopping and preparation time you save. In many stores you can make your choice quickly from a self-service, refrigerated case, and will know the exact cooking weight of the bird when you choose it; (modern cooking schedules are based on ready-to-cook weight). Remember that the work required to prepare a bird FOR cooking has been done for you.

(5) Because ready-to-cook poultry can be both inspected and graded, choosing this style of processing enables you, in many markets, to get a bird that carries the official marks of wholesomeness and quality. You have the assurance that poultry so labeled has been completely eviscerated and packed under supervised sanitary conditions. The ready-to-cook bird you choose most likely will have been eviscerated immediately after it was killed, bled, and picked, and then chilled or frozen at once. These are practices that maintain flavor and quality at their best, yet add very little to the cost of an individual bird.

(6) As a help in considering poultry prices in relation to style of processing, remember that you can afford to pay at least  $\frac{1}{8}$  MORE PER POUND for broiler or fryer chickens, at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  more for larger chickens, and at least  $\frac{1}{6}$  more for large turkeys when you buy READY TO COOK instead of dressed birds. The higher price PER POUND of ready-to-cook poultry is well justified by the fact that the removable waste was discarded and the costs of preparing the birds for your use were added BEFORE the birds were priced.



This illustration shows that there is very little difference in the ACTUAL cost of poultry meat, whichever style of processing you choose. In this example (based on prices for stewing chickens advertised by the same store on the same day), the ready-to-cook bird cost only 10 cents more than the dressed bird which, when drawn, weighed the same as the ready-to-cook chicken. In spite of the slightly higher cost of a ready-to-cook bird, consumer demand for this style of processing, with its many advantages, is rapidly increasing.