



Guidance Document

New Zealand Grass-Fed Administrative Standards User Guide

10 June 2025

Title

Guidance Document: New Zealand Grass-Fed Administrative Standards User Guide

About this document

This guide provides clarity about the requirements of the New Zealand Grass-Fed Administrative Standards.

Related Requirements

This document provides guidance to the requirements of the following grass-fed administrative standards:

- a) New Zealand Dairy Grass-Fed Administrative Standard; and
- b) New Zealand Meat Grass-Fed Administrative Standard.

Document history

| Version Date | Section Changed | Change(s) Description |
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1 Purpose

- (1) This guide provides clarity about the requirements of the New Zealand Grass-Fed Administrative Standards (the administrative standards or standards), the processes for receiving New Zealand Government recognition of a red meat or dairy producing scheme as grass-fed and applying for the New Zealand Grass-Fed FernMark.
- (2) This guide includes:
 - a) Information on the standards and why they were developed.
 - b) Deciding if the standards apply to you.
 - c) Costs associated with operating under the standards.
 - d) Frequently asked questions.

2 Why have grass-fed standards? What are they?

- (1) New Zealand's temperate climate, with plentiful rainfall and sunshine, mean our dairy and red meat production is pasture-based, with animals living and grazing on grass outdoors year-round. This is a key point of difference from most other countries, where animals may spend much of the year indoors and eating grain-based diets.
- (2) A shared, government-endorsed definition of grass-fed gives our global customers confidence in the quality of products from suppliers using the New Zealand Grass-Fed Administrative Standards. The standards were developed by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and the dairy and red meat sectors working together to define what it means for animals to be considered 'grass-fed' in New Zealand.
- (3) There are two standards: one for red meat and one for dairy. This makes it easier for applicants to understand the definition of grass-fed that their scheme must reach. It also reflects differences between red meat and dairy farming systems, to keep the standards as reflective of current New Zealand farming systems as possible.
- (4) The standards are voluntary – there is no requirement for red meat or dairy processors to use them. As they are administrative standards, they are not supported by legislation and are not regulatory requirements.

3 What does grass-fed mean?

- (1) For a dairy farm, a grass-fed dairy cow must eat a diet that is, on average, at least 90 percent comprised of grass-fed feed types. These are defined in the dairy standard. All dairy cows must also have access to pasture for, on average, at least 340 days of the year, for at least eight hours per day.
- (2) For a dairy processor, the diets of dairy cows supplying the milk pool must on average consist of, on average, at least 90 percent grass-fed feed types. They must also have access to pasture for, on average, at least 340 days of the year, for at least eight hours per day.
- (3) For red meat farms, a grass-fed animal must be fed on a diet that consists predominantly of grass-fed feed types and be permitted to graze outdoors on pasture or forage crops year-round. Feedlots are not allowed, and animals must only be removed from pasture or forage crops for animal management purposes or to safeguard them or the environment from adverse events.

4 Who is this guide for?

- (1) This guide is for New Zealand red meat and dairy processors, and farmers who wish to become certified to either the dairy or red meat standard. It also provides information for those who wish to apply for Government recognition of their grass-fed scheme, and those who wish to apply for a Grass-Fed FernMark license.
- (2) The guide also provides useful information to conformity assessment bodies whose clients include New Zealand red meat and dairy producers.

5 How do the administrative standards work?

- (1) There are three ways that organisations that own and operate a grass-fed scheme (referred to as 'scheme owners') and their clients can use the standard:
 - (i) **Use the definition:** A scheme owner can incorporate the definition of New Zealand grass-fed from the administrative standard into their scheme.
 - (ii) **Be recognised by MPI and listed on the website:** A scheme owner can apply to MPI for recognition to confirm that their scheme meets the government-backed definition of New Zealand grass-fed. MPI will review the application and, if it is approved, will list the scheme on the MPI website. MPI can also issue a letter of recognition, if requested. The scheme owner can then make an in-market claim that its grass-fed scheme has been recognised by the New Zealand Government.
 - (iii) **Use the Grass-Fed FernMark logo:** Clients of scheme owners using schemes that are recognised under the administrative standard can also apply to NZStory for a licence to use the unique New Zealand Grass-Fed FernMark logo. NZStory will seek input from MPI as part of the checking process.

6 Who are the administrative standards for?

- (1) The standards are primarily aimed at dairy and meat processors who either operate (are scheme owners) or are part of (clients) an existing assurance scheme and wish to make in-market grass-fed claims. While the standards also allow individual farm-businesses to make farm-level grass-fed claims, in practice this would likely occur through their processor's assurance scheme (i.e. their processor's assurance scheme would provide the farm-business its certification).

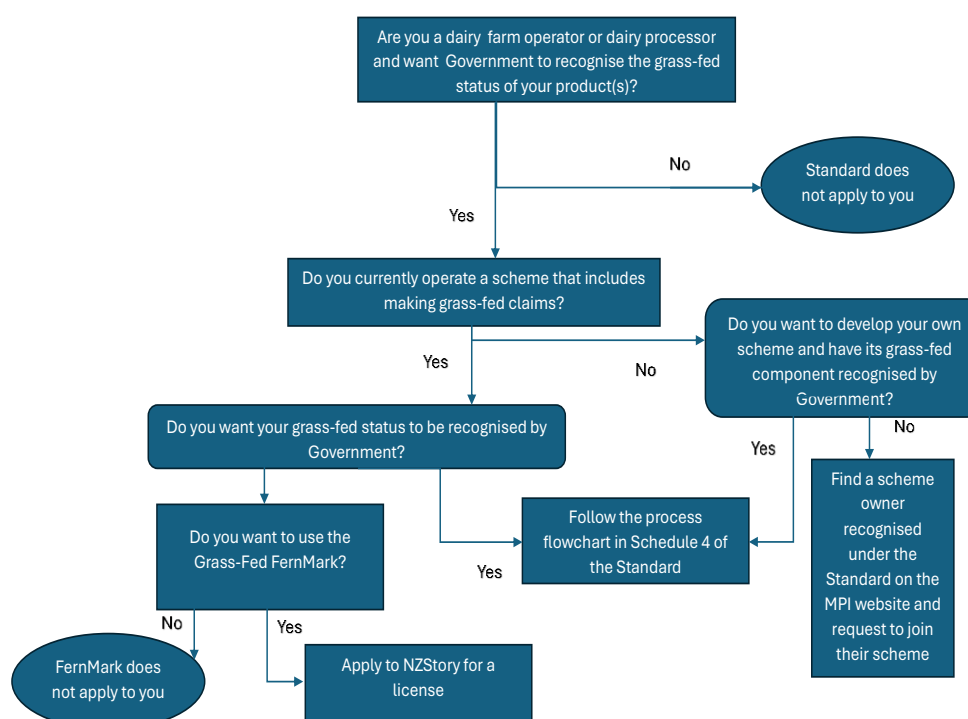
7 If I am a red meat or dairy farmer and the processor I supply signs up to one of the administrative standards, what does that mean for me?

- (1) The standard is strictly voluntary – processors can choose to sign up to it or not. If they do sign up, the products to which you supply ingredients may be marketed as 'New Zealand Grass-fed assured' and 'Government-recognised' or sold with a Grass-Fed FernMark on the pack.
- (2) For dairy suppliers (farmers), if the company you supply signs up to the dairy standard, you are most likely already providing all the data required for them to confirm that your milk meets the necessary requirements to be considered grass-fed.

- (3) For red meat suppliers (farmers), if the company you supply signs up to the red meat standard, you may be asked some additional questions when you are audited under the company's scheme (for example, Farm Assurance Programme (FAP) audits).
- (4) The verification process has been designed so it can be included within processors' existing assurance schemes. Many scheme audits already collect the required information, so there is no additional cost.

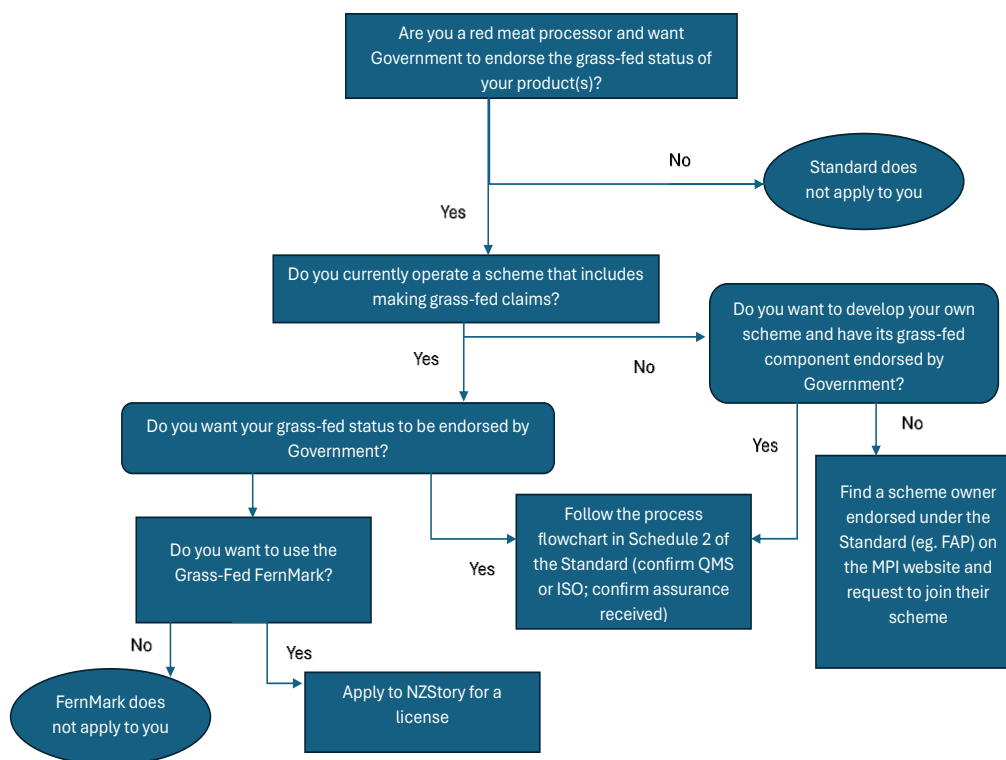
8 Understanding if the administrative standard applies to you: dairy

Decision Flow Chart- Dairy Operators and Dairy Processors Seeking Government-Recognition of Grass-Fed Claims



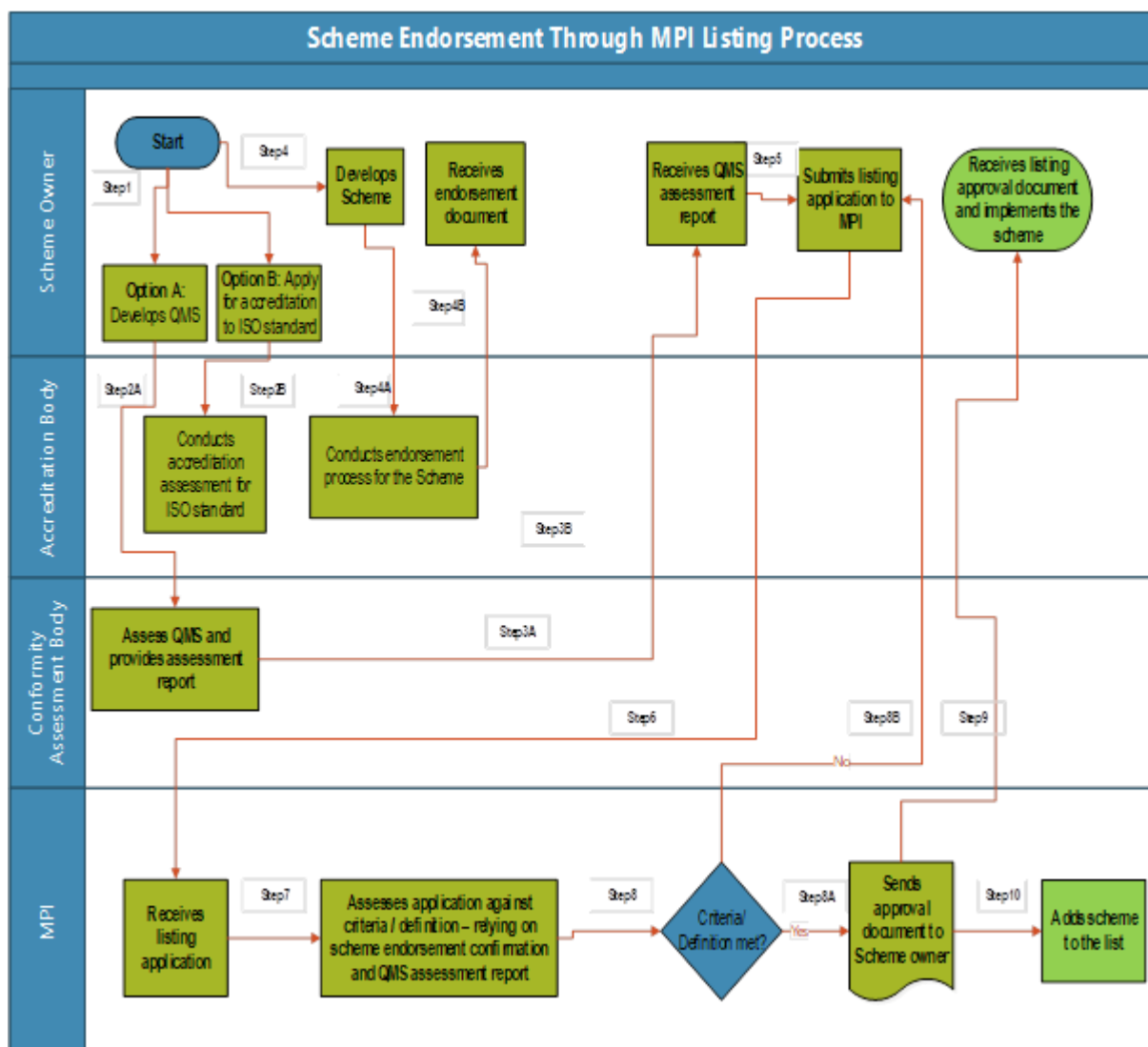
9 Understanding if the administrative standard applies to you: red meat

Decision Flow-Chart – Red Meat Processors Seeking Government-Endorsement for Grass-Fed Claims



10 How does the MPI listing scheme work?

- (1) Scheme owners can apply to MPI to be assessed under the standard. The application form can be found on MPI's website. If the scheme meets the definition of grass-fed, MPI will list it on the MPI website and, if requested, can issue a letter.
- (2) The below flowchart shows how this listing process works.



11 Q+As

11.1 When did the administrative standards commence?

- (1) The standards commenced on 11 June 2025.

11.2 How much of NZ's dairy and meat products can be considered grass-fed?

- (1) The new standards provide red meat and dairy specific definitions of grass-fed for New Zealand.
- (2) The standards specify crops that are 'grass-fed' feed types. These include grazed pasture, silages, hay and straw, as well as forage crops such as kale or turnips.
- (3) For dairy, to be considered grass-fed under the standard, for individual farms, on average 90 percent of dairy animals' diets must be made up of grass-fed feed types, and they must be on pasture or forage crops for, on average, at least 340 days per year, for at least eight hours per day. For dairy processors, on average 90 percent of dairy animal's diets that comprise the milk pool must be made up

of grass-fed feed types, and they must be on pasture or forage crops for, on average, at least 340 days per year, for at least eight hours per day

- (4) For red meat farms, to be considered grass-fed under the standard an animal must be fed on a diet that consists predominantly of grass-fed feed types and be permitted to graze outdoors on pasture or forage crops year-round. Feedlots are not allowed, and animals must only be removed from pasture or forage crops for animal management purposes or to safeguard them or the environment from adverse events.
- (5) New Zealand's temperate climate, with plentiful rainfall and sunshine, and clean air means that our dairy and red meat farms are pasture-based, with animals living and grazing outdoors year-round. This means that most farmers would not need to change their current practices to meet one of the new administrative standards.

11.3 How is the time grazing pasture or forage calculated?

- (6) The calculation considers both the time animals spend on structures, such as feed pads or barns, alongside animal management time.
- (7) Animal management time includes aspects such as milking, animal health and fertility practices, and transportation. A default value of three hours per day, a conservative estimate based on New Zealand studies, has been provided where individual farm data is not available. This ensures that the calculation accurately accounts for the time animals spend off pasture.
- (8) The eight-hour minimum daily access to pasture is used as it represents the minimum time for a dairy cow to satisfy their daily feed requirements from grazing pasture or forage crops. This is also based on New Zealand studies.

11.4 How much does it cost to be listed under one of the standards?

- (1) Scheme owners applying to have their grass-fed status assessed under one of the standards will pay an application fee, as well as a portion of costs associated with maintaining and updating the standard.
- (2) There may be up to three types of costs associated with applying under one of the standards:

11.4.1 Application fees.

- (1) MPI charges an application fee to each scheme owner applying for recognition under one of the standards. The application fee is \$135 excluding GST for a year-long listing, after which the scheme owner must apply again to continue being listed.
- (2) The scheme owner's annual application covers all products produced under the scheme; individual applications are not needed for each product or ingredient.
- (3) Farmers supplying red meat or dairy products to the scheme do not need to apply unless they want to make their own farm-level grass-fed claims under one of the standards.

11.4.2 Annual maintenance fees.

- (1) MPI charges an annual fee of \$3,262 excluding GST to cover the cost of administering and maintaining the standards. At the end of the financial year, this cost is divided equally between the number of scheme owners who have been listed under one of the standards that year and they are invoiced accordingly.

11.4.3 Grass-Fed FernMark costs.

- (1) Scheme owners may also choose to apply for a Grass-Fed FernMark license to use the mark on their products in market or allow customers to make a New Zealand grass-fed claim. The costs associated

with a Grass-Fed FernMark license vary depending on the size of the business applying. Details can be found on the NZ Story website: [Apply Online](#).

11.5 Will companies be able to make claims their products are grass fed if they do not use one of these standards?

- (1) The standards are voluntary and processors or farm businesses who do not sign up to one of them will still be able to make their own grass-fed claims about their products being grass-fed.
- (2) However, processors or farm businesses who wish to claim Government recognition of the grass-fed component of their schemes must be assessed as meeting one of these grass-fed standards. In addition, only processors or farm businesses whose schemes have been recognised by government as meeting one of the standards, and that have been certified to one of the standards by a conformance assessment body, can apply for and be issued a Grass-Fed FernMark license and display the FernMark Grass-Fed logo on their products.
- (3) Dairy and red meat processors must reapply every year and must provide a new endorsement from an independent assessment body as part of this process.

11.6 What level of verification is required for a dairy processor's milk pool to meet the dairy administrative standard?

- (1) A dairy processor needs to ensure that data from at least 80 percent of its suppliers is used for the annual grass-fed milk pool calculation. This threshold ensures that the calculation is representative, but also recognises that milk from other processors' suppliers may be received for short periods (such as during adverse events or during routine plant shutdowns), and that suppliers may occasionally not be able to supply data (e.g. due to farm sales).
- (2) Data from at least a third of a processor's suppliers should be verified annually, so that all suppliers have their data verified over a three-year cycle. This excludes milk that is received for short periods from other processors' suppliers, such as due to adverse events or routine plant shutdowns, as long as this makes up less than five percent of the milk pool.
- (3) Red meat data will be verified through additional questions in their processor's scheme audit (for example, Farm Assurance Programme (FAP) audit).

11.7 How will the government recognition be verified?

- (1) A scheme owner must provide both an assessment of its quality management system and confirmation their scheme meets the requirements of one of the standards from an independent assessment body in order to gain government recognition.
- (2) They must then reapply annually to continue their scheme's recognition. For this they must provide confirmation from an independent assessment body that their scheme quality management system remains fit for purpose and their scheme continues to meet the relevant grass-fed standard requirements.

11.8 MPI recently released a methodology to estimate farms' greenhouse gas emissions, which includes farm inputs like supplementary feed. Will farmers need to record different data or use two different calculations with the launch of the grass-fed standard?

- (1) No, the MPI Farm Emissions Method and Grass-fed Administrative Standards calculations use the same data inputs and methodology to determine both GHG emissions and grass-fed percentage. This ensures both methods are credible, and the process for collecting and undertaking calculations from the data are efficient.

11.9 Keeping up to date

- (1) The New Zealand Grass-Fed Administrative Standards will be reviewed one year after their launch date of June 2025 and then at least every three years. To keep up to date with changes or news, you can:
- (2) Visit the New Zealand Grass-Fed Administrative Standards on MPI's website.
- (3) If you have a specific question, please contact MPI at info@mpi.govt.nz.