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MAVs and USDA Products

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Recently NIST received several questions about when to apply MAVs and when to apply USDA lower limits to meat and poultry products packaged at USDA plants. The answer is fairly straight-forward:

- if the package bears a USDA seal, inspectors must apply the USDA lower limits (Table 2-9 in Handbook 133);
- if the package does not bear a USDA seal, inspectors should apply the regular MAVs (Tables 2-5 and 2-6 in Handbook 133).

This applies not only to items found in the meat case, but also to products like soups and broths that contain meat and poultry.

USDA seals may vary slightly from packer to packer. Below are a few examples of the types of seals that are commonly used:



Most of the confusion seems to stem from the fact that more and more often meat and poultry products are being prepackaged at central packing establishments, many of which are USDA plants. However, some of these meat and poultry products are not weighed at

the point-of-pack and may not receive a USDA seal. Regardless of where the product is ultimately weighed and labeled, if it bears a USDA seal, the USDA lower limits apply; if there is no seal, the MAVs apply.

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