

# MARBLING DESCRIPTIONS & ILLUSTRATIONS

## Quality Grade Description

At right appear the six most commonly found marbling degrees available to foodservice purchasers.

The descriptions apply to beef carcasses from animals of approximately 9 to 30 months of age. The U.S. Department of Agriculture designates this age animal to be "A" maturity in its official grading standards.

95 percent or more of the officially graded beef that is made available to foodservice purchasers is of "A" maturity.

## Marbling Descriptions

- The degree of marbling illustrates the minimum amount of marbling necessary to qualify for the following U.S. quality grades.
- Though not officially graded except as U.S. Prime or U.S. Choice, the degree-of-marbling photographs do identify the points within each grade level.

*Further explanations as to the meaning of the quality grading photographs or the criteria may be obtained from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Marketing Service, Livestock & Seed Program, either the Standardization Branch, or the Meat Grading and Certification Branch, or from a member of the North American Meat Processors Association.*

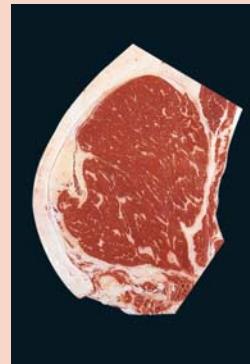
Since marbling is such an important factor in grading beef quality, the following pictures illustrate the lower limits of six marbling degrees: Moderately Abundant, Slightly Abundant, Moderate, Modest, Small, and Slight.

It should be noted that there are ten degrees of marbling referred to in the Official United States Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef. These color photographs have been developed to assist government, industry, and academia in the proper application of official grade standards.



### MODERATELY ABUNDANT

- The minimum marbling degree necessary for average U.S. Prime.



### SLIGHTLY ABUNDANT

- U.S. PRIME must, at the minimum level, be representative of Slightly Abundant.
- The minimum marbling necessary to qualify for U.S. Prime grade.



### MODERATE

- The minimum marbling degree necessary for high U.S. Choice.



### MODEST

- The minimum marbling degree necessary for average U.S. Choice.



### SMALL

- U.S. CHOICE must, at the minimum level, be representative of Small.
- The minimum marbling necessary to qualify for U.S. Choice grade.

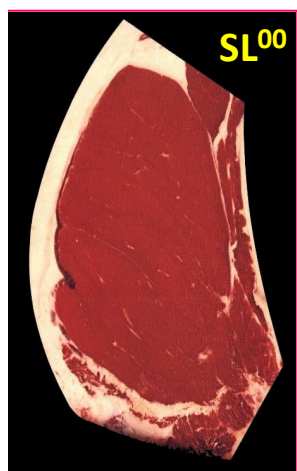


### SLIGHT

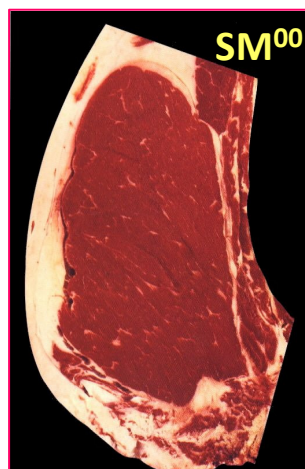
- U.S. SELECT must, at the minimum level, be representative of Slight.

The above illustrations are reduced reproductions of the Official USDA Marbling Photographs prepared for the U.S. Department of Agriculture by and available from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

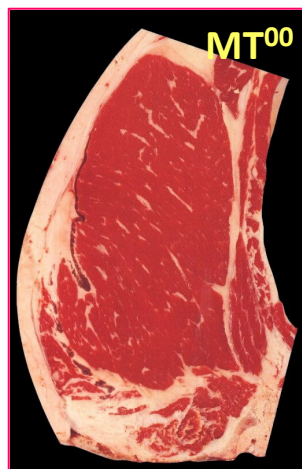
# U.S. Marbling Scores



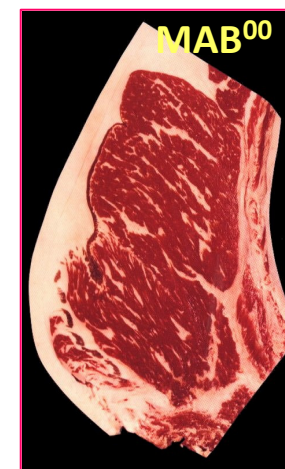
**SELECT**



**LOWER 1/3  
CHOICE**



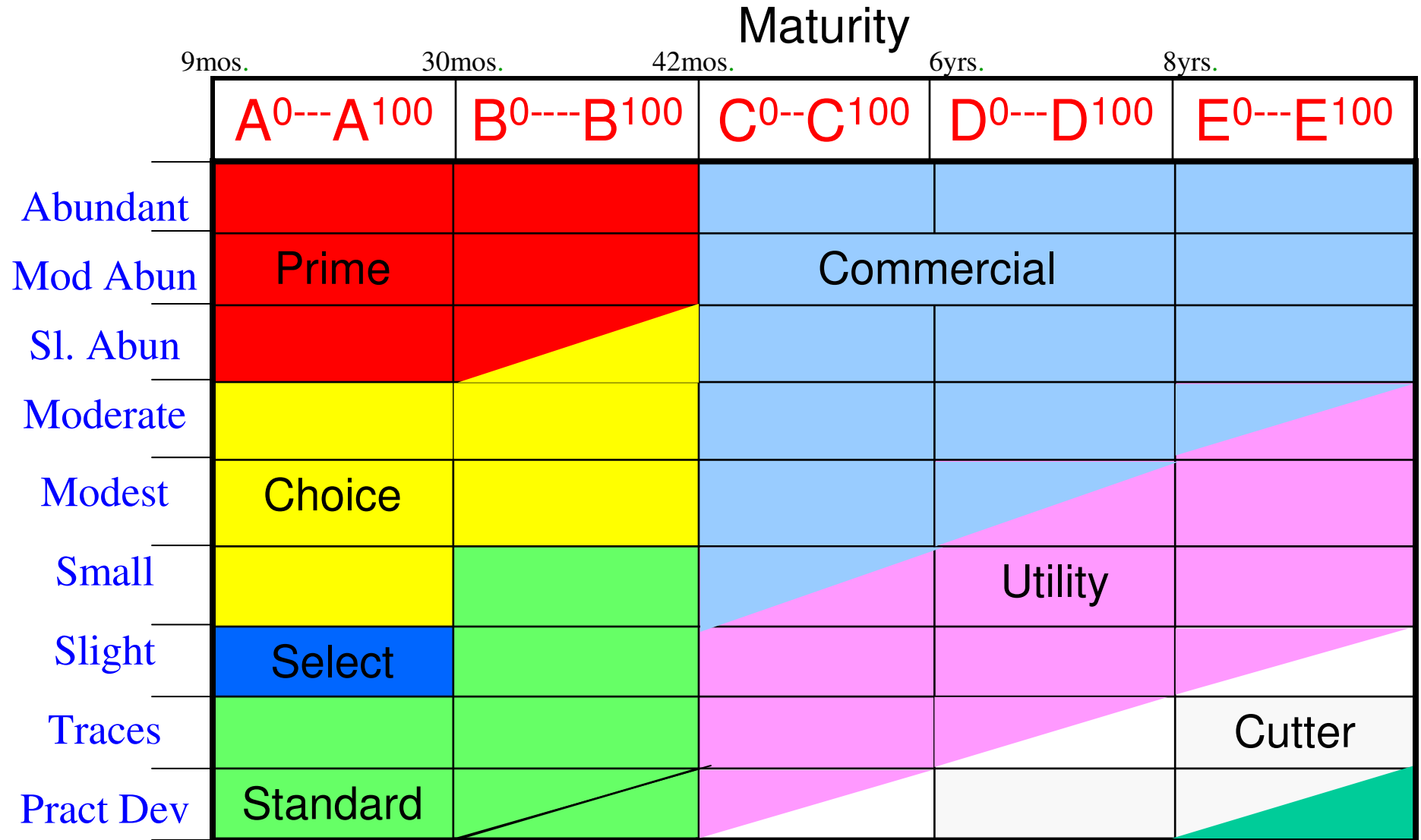
**UPPER 2/3 CHOICE**



**PRIME**

**PREMIUM BEEF PROGRAMS**

# USDA Beef Grades



Marbling Score