



Agricultural Marketing Service
Commodity Procurement Program
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

USDA COMMODITY REQUIREMENTS

NATURAL PEPPER JACK CHEESE (MONTEREY JACK CHEESE WITH PEPPERS)

FOR USE IN DOMESTIC PROGRAMS

Effective Date: [October 2025](#)



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FOR USE IN DOMESTIC PROGRAMS

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Part 1 COMMODITY SPECIFICATIONS

Section 1.1 COMMODITIES

I. Product Requirements

A. Natural Pepper Jack Cheese. The product shall:

- (1) Comply with all applicable Federal regulations including, but not limited to, those contained in [21 CFR § 133.153](#) for Monterey cheese and Monterey Jack cheese and Spiced, flavored standardized cheeses as defined in [21 CFR § 133.193](#). Exceptions to the moisture requirements in 21 CFR § 133.153 are outlined in Section 1.1, “Composition Requirements” for shredded cheese.
- (2) Contain an even distribution of brined jalapeno peppers. Serrano peppers and/or red bell peppers may be included.
- (3) Comply with [21 CFR § 133.146](#) for grated cheeses.
- (4) Comply with all applicable Federal and State mandatory requirements and regulations relating to the preparation, packaging, labeling, storage, distribution, and sale of the cheese within the commercial marketplace.

II. Production Requirements

- A. The cheese delivered to the Government shall have been manufactured from pasteurized milk that was produced in the United States and not previously owned by the Government, and in plants that were inspected and approved by the Dairy Grading Branch (DGB), Dairy Program (DP), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS). [The USDA AMS plant approval code must match the appropriate product or operation code for the commodity being offered.](#) All manufacturers are required to give at least 14 days’ advance notice of Commodity Procurement production schedules to the DGB.
- B. All dairy ingredients shall be pasteurized at a temperature of not less than 161°F (71.7°C) for a period of not less than 15 seconds, or for a time and at a temperature equivalent thereto in phosphatase destruction.
- C. Dairy ingredients used in the manufacture of cheese shall originate from a plant that has been approved by the DGB, DP, AMS, USDA. The USDA AMS plant approval code must match the appropriate product or operation code for the dairy ingredient being used.
- D. Cheese used for cutting shall be clean, free from impurities, mold, rind rot, soft spots, salt spots, pests, and other similar defects.
- E. A mold inhibitor may be applied in accordance with the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.
- F. Cheese which deviates from the specifications contained herein will be rejected or, at the

discretion of the contracting officer, accepted at discounts to be determined by the Government.

- G. Notwithstanding the other provisions of this section, the presence of any extraneous material in the natural Pepper Jack cheese will be the basis for rejection.

III. Product Age and Temperature Requirements

Cheese product age and temperature requirements shall comply with the following:

Requirement	Description
Product Age	No lot or sublot may contain cheese having a variation of over 5 to 10 days in dates of manufacture. The cheese shall be delivered to the government within 15 days from the date of packaging.
Temperature	The cheese shall be stored at 38° to 45°F (3.3° to 7.2°C) prior to inspection At the time of delivery, the cheese shall have a temperature of no higher than 45°F (7.2°C)

IV. Composition Requirements

Pepper Jack cheese shall meet the composition requirements in Section 1.1, Product Requirements, Part A, with the following exceptions for **shredded cheese**:

Composition	Shredded Pepper Jack Cheese
pH	4.95-5.3
Moisture	Shall not exceed 42.5%
Fat (dry basis)	50-55%
Sodium	Shall not exceed 620mg/100g (173mg/28g serving)

V. Microbiological Requirements

A Certificate of Analysis (COA) will satisfy the requirement for the incoming bulk product and the finished Pepper Jack cheese which shall meet the following microbiological requirements:

Coliform	<10 cfu/g
Yeast & Mold	<100 cfu/g
E. coli	<10 MPN/g OR <10 cfu/g
Staphylococcus aureus	<10 cfu/g
Salmonella	Negative per 375 grams (15 x 25g)
L. Monocytogenes	Negative per 125 grams (5 x 25g)

VI. Physical Analysis

Pepper Jack cheese physical analysis requirements shall comply with the following:

Pepper Jack Cheese
Flavor: Cheese shall have a mild to medium spiced jalapeno flavor and shall possess a characteristic Pepper Jack cheese flavor. Cheese shall meet the flavor requirements of U.S. Grade A or better according to the U.S. Standards for Grades of Monterey Cheese.
Body and Texture: Pepper Jack cheese prior to shredding may have the following body and texture characteristics to a very slight degree: mealy, weak, or pasty. The cheese shall have a slightly open texture and be free from all foreign and extraneous materials. Shredded Pepper Jack cheese shall be feather shredded and have a height and width up to 3/16 inch in either dimension. Shredded Pepper Jack cheese shall be free flowing and shall not be matted. An approved anticaking agent may be added as a processing aid. If an anticaking agent is used, the amount used shall be the minimum required to produce the desired effect but shall not exceed 2.0% of the weight of the shredded Pepper Jack cheese.
Color and Appearance: Cheese shall be white to light in color with an even distribution of peppers. Colors from peppers shall not smear or bleed. No visible signs of mold shall be permitted.
Fines: Shredded Pepper Jack cheese shall contain not more than 6.0% fines. For shreds whose height and/or width is 1/16 inch or less, the fines content shall be determined using a Standard Test Sieve #14 (1.4 mm). For shreds whose height and/or width is greater than 1/16 inch, the fines content shall be determined using Standard Test Sieve #8 (2.36 mm). Note: The manufacturer shall provide shred size information. This information will determine the sieve used to measure the fines content. If shred size information is not provided, the Standard Test Sieve #8 will be used.

- A. The cheese shall be evaluated through a qualitative procedure to measure the characteristics of the melting profile. The cheese shall melt completely and evenly.
- B. Manufacturer's/Distributor's Product Assurance. The manufacturer/distributor shall certify that the cheese provided shall meet the requirement of this Commodity Requirements Document (CRD), conform to their own specifications, standards, and quality assurance practices, and be the same cheese offered for sale in the commercial market. The USDA reserves the right to require proof of conformance.
- C. **Blocked Pepper Jack cheese must be converted to shredded Pepper Jack cheese within 30 days of manufacture.** The contractor shall be liable for losses due to excessive deterioration, mold development, or spoilage, which are discovered within **120 days** from pack date (**for final shredded cheese product**).

Section 1.2 QUALITY ASSURANCE

I. Inspection, Testing and Certification Requirements

- A. Manufacturers must request for AMS Dairy Program to evaluate samples of finished product for each production run in Section One plants of the Dairy Plants Surveyed and Approved for USDA Grading Service list. Manufacturers must request AMS Dairy Program to be present for continuous online inspection for each production run in Section Two plants of the Dairy Plants Surveyed and

Approved for USDA Grading Service list. The quality, date(s) of manufacture, and weight of the cheese will be evidenced by grading certificates issued by AMS.

- B. The moisture, milkfat, fines, **sodium**, and pH analyses shall be performed by AMS, an independent commercial laboratory using AOAC International approved methodology, or the contractor's laboratory that complies with the inspection clause in the contract. The results shall be evidenced by a COA maintained by the contractor. The contracting officer may require submission of COAs representing contract performance.
- C. **All COAs, whether issued by AMS, the contractor, or a third party, shall be retained by the contractor. USDA requires the contractor to retain all COAs for a minimum of seven years from the date of issuance.**
- D. Contractors shall notify the Government immediately of lots that fail to meet contract requirements.
- E. Manufacturer's/distributor's certification. When the contractor performs quality assurance, the manufacturer/distributor will certify that the cheese distributed meets or exceeds the requirements of this CRD.
- F. USDA certification. When AMS performs quality assurance, the DGB, DP, AMS, USDA shall be the certifying program. DGB inspectors shall certify the quality and acceptability of the cheese in accordance with DGB procedures which include selecting random samples of the cheese, evaluating the samples for conformance with the salient characteristics of this CRD and other contractual requirements, and documenting the findings on official DGB certificates. In addition, when required in the solicitation, contract, or purchase order, DGB inspectors will examine the cheese for conformance to the United States Standards for Condition for Food Containers in effect on the date of the solicitation. To qualify for this option the plant must be listed in Dairy Plants Surveyed and Approved for USDA Grading Service. The USDA AMS plant approval code must match the appropriate product or operation code for the commodity being manufactured.
- G. USDA inspection notes. USDA certification shall include evaluation of the quality and condition of samples of the cheese and compliance with requirements in the following areas.
 - (1) Pepper Jack cheese Requirements (Sec 1.1).
 - (2) Composition Requirements (Sec. 1.1). When USDA testing of cheese is specified, DGB inspection personnel shall select samples and submit them to the USDA, Science and Technology Programs (S&TP) laboratory for analysis.
 - (3) Packaging Requirements (Part 2).

Part 2 CONTAINER AND PACKAGING REQUIREMENTS

Section 2.1 COMMERCIAL PACKAGING AND LABELING

I. Packaging and Labeling Requirements

- A. Contractors shall supply commercial brand products only and shall certify at the time of submission of an offer that the commercial product being delivered has a history of successful distribution and use in domestic commercial channels and is sold on the commercial market with an established level of consumer acceptance.
- B. Container and packaging requirements are those used in the current commercial shipping practices and shall comply with:
- (1) **Container, Packaging, and Unitization requirements in the AMS Master Invitation for Bids.**
 - (2) At contractor's option, a statement such as "Not for Retail Sale" may be printed on the principal display panel of the food label.
 - (3) The manufacturer's lot code/lot identification number shall be shown on the commercial bill of lading.
 - (4) Shipping containers shall be marked to show the maximum safe stacking height. It is the responsibility of the contractor in cooperation with the shipping container manufacturers to determine the safe stacking height.
 - (5) For identification upon receipt at delivery warehouses, all commercial-labeled product shipping documents shall specify "FOR USDA FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAMS."
- C. The month/**day**/year of pack shall be shown on all primary packaging (immediate containers) and shipping containers.
- D. A Best If Used By Date shall be shown on all primary packaging (immediate containers).**

Section 2.2 MATERIALS

I. Material Codes

Material Code	Product Description	Cases Per Truck	Net Weight Per Truck
111220	Shredded Pepper Jack Cheese – 4/5 lb.	1,940 cases	38,800 lbs.