

Industry News - AM

Temple Grandin clarification on Niman Ranch certification program

By [Janie Gabbett](#) on 2/16/2009

Niman Ranch issued a news release last week on a new certification program. (See [Temple Grandin launches new sustainable and humane certification on Meatingplace.com](#), Feb. 11, 2009.)



Over the weekend, Temple Grandin issued the full statement below. On Sunday she spoke with **Meatingplace** and issued the following summary statement to further clarify her involvement with the Niman Ranch program.

Summary statement from Temple Grandin

There has been considerable confusion generated by the original Niman Ranch press release dated Feb. 11, 2009. The program is an existing Niman Ranch program and I am working with them to make their standards clearer and easier to audit. My seal of approval is verification that they adhere to Niman Ranch standards and have a rigorous auditing program. Niman Ranch has more work to do and they are planning to have their auditing system in place by the summer. Other companies can also develop a program and seek my approval. The standards for each company are specific to each company, but they must have a high level of animal welfare that can be verified by audits.

Full Statement from Temple Grandin

The meat industry has evolved into two major sectors of conventional and niche/natural/organic. I work with both sectors to develop guidelines that are clear and that can be easily audited. It is important to eliminate vague wording such as adequate or sufficient unless these words are defined. In the slaughter plant, the standards for both sectors can be the same. Both the conventional and the niche/natural/organic sectors use the AMI guidelines. On the farm, standards will have more differences both between and within each sector.

I have worked with Niman Ranch to clarify their EXISTING guidelines so they would be clearer and less prone to different interpretations. The 21 Core principles on the Niman Ranch press release dated February 11, 2009 are a rewritten clearer version of the basic guidelines for the Niman Ranch pork and beef programs that has been in existence for many years. The only added statements are on sustainable agriculture which are basic good agricultural practices for both sectors of the industry.

I have worked with many companies, both conventional and niche/natural/organic to define the terms in their guidelines more clearly. My approval of Niman Ranch guidelines was from an auditing standpoint - and not my personal opinion standpoint.

The next step for Niman Ranch is clarifying and revising their specific guidelines for each species and setting up a system of internal and independent third party audits.

My personal opinion on housing for pigs is much more moderate. I personally approve of farrowing stalls and I think it is very positive that industry is evaluating alternative sow housing and that some producers have already converted to group housing. It would not be practical to house all pigs outside and most conventional pigs will still be housed indoors in the same buildings that now exist. However, there is a legitimate place in the U.S. industry for different niche/natural/organic sectors which will raise pigs outside or on straw.

My personal views on the use of antibiotics and growth promotants are also much more moderate, but some niche markets will prohibit them. One of my biggest concerns is the overuse of either growth promotants or genetic selection that overload the biological system. Overloading the animal's biological system can cause weak, stressed, or lame animals that are difficult to handle humanely.

I work with both sectors. I will work as a consultant with both sectors to help them state their guidelines clearly and implement effective auditing programs. This is important so that the consumers of both conventional or niche/natural/organic products will get the products that are stated on their label.

My approval of Niman Ranch is for the clarity of their standards, not the content of their specific niche/natural standards. With every company I work with, both conventional or niche/natural/organic, there are basic welfare core criteria that must be in the specific guidelines for each species. Animals must be evaluated for body condition score, injuries, lameness, and cleanliness. The program must also have objective scoring for handling. All companies I have consulted with use the AMI guidelines. In programs that prohibit antibiotics or other pharmaceuticals, failure to treat sick animals should be grounds for delisting a farm.

Questions about the label

There have also been many questions about the Temple Grandin approved label. This label would certify that a company has a credible auditing program and that they actually are complying with their own standards. Before the label can actually be used, Niman's auditing system must be in place. The following steps will need to be implemented:

- Rewrite existing guidelines for Niman pork and beef so they are clearer and more auditable. Audit forms must also be created.
- Develop a formal auditing system. A good auditing system has three components. They are: internal audits of all farms, audits by Niman corporate personnel and independent third party audits. The internal audits would be conducted by existing Niman field staff who would visit every farm or ranch every 30 days. The corporate and third party audits would be conducted annually with a random sampling of the producers. Producers with problems would also be visited.
- In addition to Niman guidelines, both pork and beef producers must also comply with NCBA and Pork Board Quality Assurance and animal welfare guidelines. Truckers transporting Niman livestock would have to take the trucker training course.
- All auditors both internal and third party will need to be trained to use the rewritten standards to audit pork and beef producers.
- Farms and ranches must also comply with national, state, and local environmental regulations.