



Fresh Products Grading and Certification



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USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service
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Program Information

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) official grading services ensure that seller's products meet specified grade or contract requirements. For buyers, USDA grading services ensure that they get the quality that they expect.

USDA works with 48 States and Puerto Rico to administer the Federal-State Inspection Service, a nationwide grading program for growers, shippers and receivers of fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts and specialty products.

USDA and partnering state graders work throughout the country at points of origin, often working in fields as crops are harvested. Grading services are provided at 137 federal and state terminal markets in major U.S. cities.

How Are U.S. Grade Standards Used?

USDA inspects commodities against 158 official grade standards that describe an item's color, size, shape and other quality and condition characteristics, giving industry a common language for buying and selling.

USDA works to ensure that the standards are uniformly applied throughout the country.

Grade standards are available on the Internet at www.ams.usda.gov/standards/stanfrfv.htm.

Program Enhancements

Since 1999, USDA improved its fresh fruit and vegetable grading and certification program by heightening its nationwide uniformity and expanding services to industry customers.

Graders now use **laptop computers** to complete inspection certificates. No longer handwritten with pen and paper, certificates are printed on the premises for the customer, and made available on a secure Internet site for the shippers. The portable computers contain all grading manuals, U.S. grade standards, visual aids and other instructions to help graders perform the most accurate inspection possible.

Digital images taken by graders of the inspected lot may be attached to the certificate to reinforce inspection results.

In 2001, USDA opened the doors of its new **Training and Development Center** in Fredericksburg, VA. Facility staff conduct multi-week courses for newly hired graders and refresher classes for experienced graders.

AMS has since begun conducting produce inspection training courses for industry members in partnership with the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association, and customized classes for other industry groups.

Alternative Inspection Programs

USDA has created additional grading and inspection services for fresh fruits and vegetables. The programs help industry customers minimize costs and can be tailored to meet the individual needs of the particular industry and commodity.

- Under “Partners In Quality,” USDA inspection personnel audit documentation-intensive systems used by packinghouses to ensure the quality of the commodities passing through them. USDA develops quality specifications for the industry, assists each packinghouse involved in developing its own unique quality procedures manual and audits each packinghouse’s system to ensure compliance with its own manual.



- Under the “Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices (GAP and GHP) Audit Verification Program,” USDA and State inspectors review participating fresh fruit and vegetable packing facilities and practices according to the Food and Drug Administration’s *Guide to Minimize Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*.

- Under the “Customer Assisted Inspection Program” (CAIP), USDA inspection personnel oversee the in-line sampling and inspection process performed by trained company staff. Once procedures are established, USDA-licensed inspectors train company staff in performing inspections (including sampling, defect identification and scoring, and note keeping) and, if they qualify, authorize them as “CAIP inspectors.” The level of USDA oversight ranges from periodic visits throughout the day to a continuous on-site presence.

Contacts

For further information, contact the Fresh Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 1661-S, Stop Code 0240, Washington, D.C. 20250-0240. Telephone: (202) 720-5870. FAX: (202) 720-0393. Internet: www.ams.usda.gov/fv/fvstand.htm. E-mail: leanne.skelton@usda.gov.

Information is also available from the Federal or Federal-State grading office nearest to you.

Notes

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