

USDA Actions

Tom Fulton
(202) 786-1780

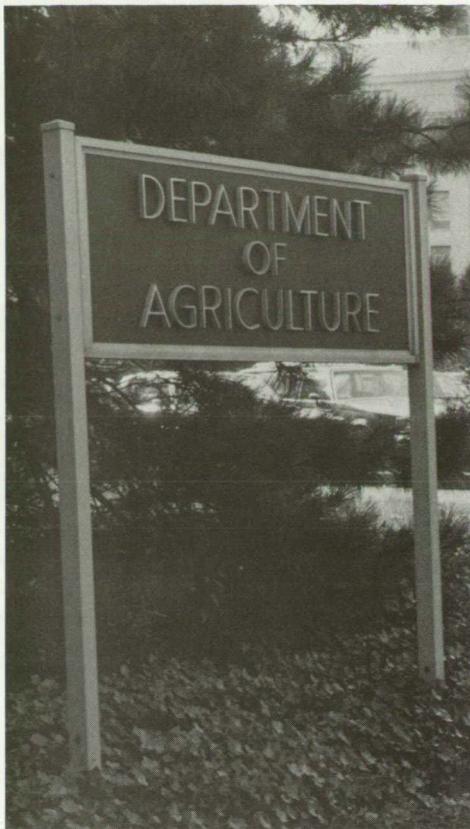
USDA regularly implements operational and regulatory changes that affect the status of food and nutrition in the United States. Here are some relevant actions.

Lower Fat Cooked Sausage Products.

USDA has proposed that meat processors be allowed to make lower fat hot dogs, bologna, and other cooked sausage products, as long as labels on the product meet USDA rules for lean and lower fat claims. Under the proposal, processors would be able to replace fat in cooked sausage products by adding water above the current limit of 10 percent. The new limit would allow a 40-percent fat and added water combination in these products. The labels could say "lite," "light," "leaner," or "lower fat," if the products contain at least 25 percent less fat than similar products in the market. However, when using one of the labeling terms, the producer must include a statement explaining the comparison. For example, a label for lower fat hot dogs might say: "This product contains 20 percent fat, while USDA allows 30 percent fat in regular hot dogs."

Canned Fruit Exports. USDA has approved an additional \$500,000 to expand exports of canned peaches and fruit cocktail; \$5.1 million had already been approved for this project in August 1986. The increase is to help California's canned peach industry counter subsidized products from the European Economic Community. Promotional activities will be carried out through an agreement between the Department's Foreign Agricultural Service and the California Cling Peach Advisory Board, a nonprofit organization that has worked with USDA on export promotion programs since 1964.

The author is a social science analyst with the Food and Agricultural Policy Branch of the National Economics Division.



Restriction on Container Size for Meat Fat Shortening. New regulations proposed by USDA would remove its current restriction on the size of containers allowed for artificially flavored and colored meat fat shortening. The change would allow meat processors to expand the market for this product by appealing to commercial customers who prefer to buy in large quantities. The proposal would also bring USDA into line with current Food and Drug Administration regulations, which do not specify container size.

Surface Application of Vitamin E for Bacon. USDA now allows bacon processors to apply vitamin E to the surface of bacon to prevent nitrosamine formation. Nitrosamines form at high frying temperatures when sodium nitrite, which is used in the curing process to prevent botulism, combines with naturally occurring amines in the meat. Nitrosamines have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals.

Flavor Enhancer in Meat Products. Calcium lactate can now be used as a flavor enhancer in some sausages and meat sticks.

Under a new USDA rule, meat processors can add up to 0.6 percent calcium lactate to cooked sausage.

Grade Standards for Bunched Spinach.

USDA has proposed establishing voluntary grade standards for bunched spinach. The standards were requested by the industry and would provide a common trading language and a means of determining quality and value. The proposal would establish two grade levels, U.S. No. 1 and No. 2, and would provide standards similar to those used for other types of domestic fresh produce.

Safety Review of Animal Drugs. USDA is participating in an international review of several commonly used livestock drugs to establish an agreement on the safety of drug residues in food. The Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Food Use is a new committee established by the Codex Alimentaris Commission, an international group of experts who work toward the adoption of common food standards to protect consumers and promote fair trade.

Bovine Growth Hormone Study. USDA is studying the use of bovine growth hormone and its economic effect on the dairy industry. This study, which will be completed by mid to late 1987, will quantify the hormone's impact on the Government's milk price support program and on the structure of the dairy industry. The study, requested by Congress, will be conducted by the Economic Research Service.

Egg Research and Promotion Order. USDA has proposed establishing a new consumer information, research, and promotion order for eggs. The order would establish a national board, appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture, to administer activities designed to expand the egg industry's position in the market.

Small-Scale Farming Office. USDA has established an office for small-scale agriculture in response to the growth of the number of small farms that reflect consumers' increased preference for fresh, locally grown produce. According to the Census Bureau's 1982 census, the number of farms with less than 50 acres has increased 17 percent since 1978. Many of these are operated by part-time farmers who produce diverse agricultural products, including vegetables, fruits, nursery plants, honey, and livestock. The new office will provide

information on research, education, and technological developments of interest to small and medium-sized farmers. Support for the new office will be provided by the Small Farm Resources Development Working Group, which consists of representatives from several USDA agencies.

Unshu Orange Imports. USDA is considering allowing the importation of Japanese Unshu oranges into an expanded area of the United States. Currently, these oranges may be imported only into Alaska,

Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, because the climate in these States prevents the spread of a citrus canker endemic to this fruit. Under the proposal, the orange would be allowed in all areas of the United States, except those where citrus is commercially grown.

Japanese Market Access for U.S. Cherries. Japan has agreed to permit entry of U.S. fresh cherries at the beginning of the 1987 marketing year. This change, which is scheduled for a date earlier than was originally agreed upon, will allow California cherries to compete in Japan for the first time. Fresh cherries can enter Japan on May 25, 1987, instead of July 1. The entry date will move up 1 day for each of the next 4 years. In 1992, all entry dates for U.S. cherries will be eliminated.

State Meat and Poultry Inspection. USDA has announced that it will halt its quarterly review of State-inspected plants and begin a new, comprehensive oversight program. Federal laws for meat and poultry inspection allow products from USDA-inspected plants to be sold in interstate or foreign commerce. Products from State inspected plants can be sold only in that State. States are required to impose inspection requirements at least equal to those of USDA. The new oversight program is designed to give a more complete assessment and to use USDA resources more efficiently. USDA will review each State's program at least annually. Both initial and follow-up reviews may include examination of State-inspected plants but this will no longer be mandatory. USDA field inspectors will be able to spend more time providing expert advice and consultation to State program personnel.

Official USDA Mark to Seal Samples. USDA has proposed that meat and poultry samples collected by USDA inspectors for testing be sealed with an official mark to prevent tampering. The proposal calls for an official mark with the words "official sample" and the USDA logo. □



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