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USDA Actions

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

Autogenous Biological Products. New regulations proposed by USDA would allow Federal licensing of veterinary biologics manufacturers who produce only autogenous products. An autogenous biologic is a product that has been prepared from a culture of microorganisms that was derived from a sick animal. The infected herd or flock is then treated with the finished product. Such biologics are used primarily during emergencies to treat animal diseases for which there is no licensed product. Currently manufacturers are licensed if they make nonautogenous products, such as vaccines or bacterins, but once licensed, they may then produce autogenous products as well.

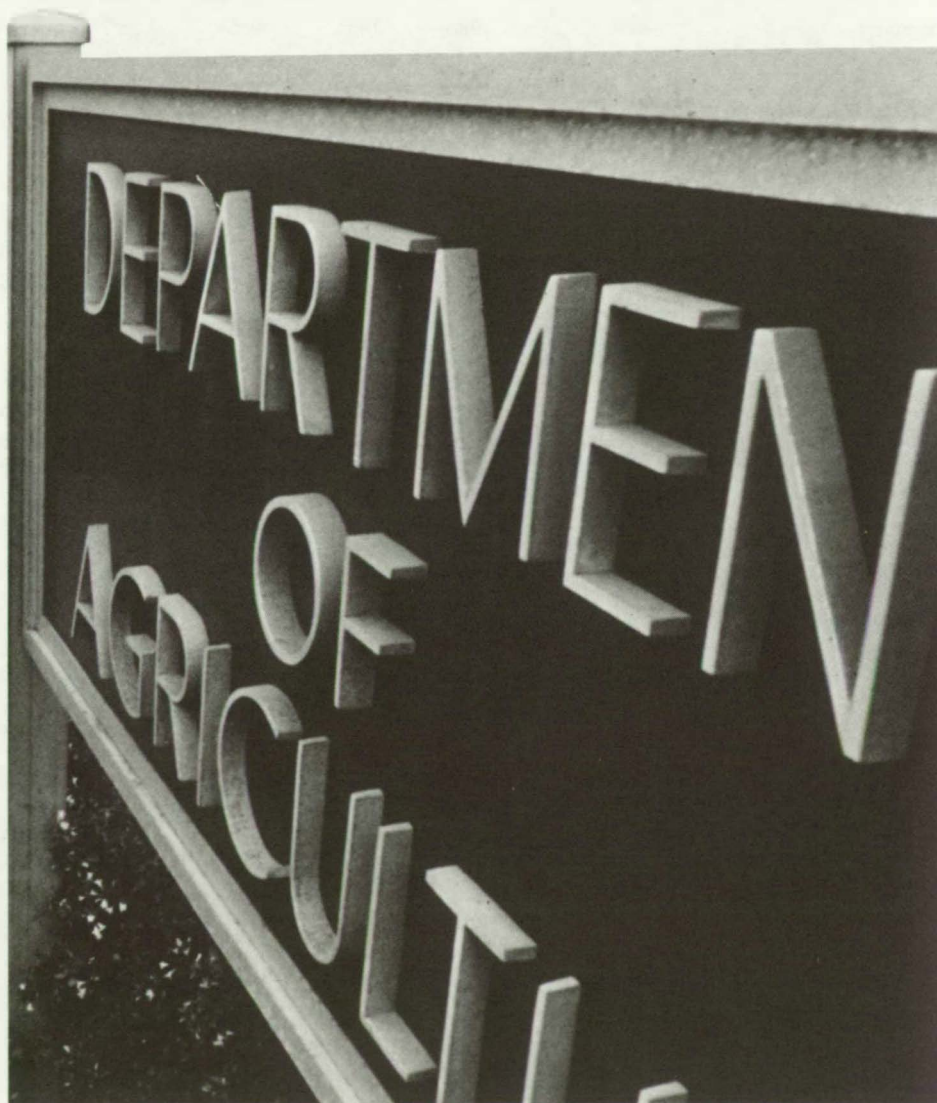
Beef Promotion and Research. USDA issued a final rule implementing a national beef promotion and research order to strengthen the position of beef in the marketplace. The program is funded by a mandatory \$1 per head assessment on all cattle marketed in the United States, as well as an equivalent amount on imported cattle and beef. The program will be administered by the Cattleman's Beef Promotion and Research Board, made up of about 113 cattle producers and importers nominated by the industry and appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture. Producer assessments began October 1.

Pork Promotion, Research, and Consumer Information Order. Secretary of Agriculture Richard E. Lyng announced a final order implementing a national pork promotion, research, and consumer information order and the appointment of 160 pork

producers and importers to the National Pork Producers Delegate Body. The program will be funded by a mandatory assessment of up to $\frac{1}{4}$ of 1 percent of the market value of each hog sold in the United States, as well as an equivalent amount on imported hogs, pork, and pork products.

Substances in Fresh Pork. An interim final rule has been proposed by USDA that would permit the controlled use of sub-

stances that maintain the color of fresh pork cuts for the duration of their normal, safe shelf-life. The substances are ascorbic acid, erythorbic acid, citric acid, sodium ascorbate, and sodium citrate. Fresh pork cuts lose their color long before they become unsafe to eat, and some consumers find the off-color less desirable. USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service reviewed data that indicated that certain acidic substances can safely extend the acceptable color and ap-



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pearance of fresh pork. Only processors operating under a USDA-approved partial quality control program will be allowed to use the substances. Under this program, plants establish controls at certain processing steps, which are monitored by USDA inspectors to assure correct operation. In addition, the prescribed conditions under which the substances are permitted will ensure they do not mask signs of food spoilage.

Inspection Exemption for Certain Central Kitchens. Certain central kitchens of restaurants are now exempt from routine inspection by USDA. The eligible kitchens—there are currently about 40—are those that transport ready-to-eat meat and poultry products directly to their satellite restaurants or vending machines for serving to customers. To be eligible for the exemption, a central kitchen's products may not be stored, sold, or otherwise change hands before arriving at the outlets, and both the central kitchen and the outlets must be owned or operated by the same legal entity.

Donated Food Delivery. USDA has proposed streamlining the two delivery systems used for getting surplus food to schools, charitable institutions, and other eligible participants into one system. The new National Inventory System (NIS), which is being tested this year in six States, would replace delivery systems now operated by States and USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. The Secretary of Agriculture will designate which donated foods are available through NIS. Under the current systems, these include cheese, nonfat dry milk, butter, and honey.

Restructured Meat Product Binder Use. The Department of Agriculture has begun permitting meat processors to use a combi-

nation of dry substances to create a binder for restructured meat products. The name of the binder must be included on the label next to the product's name. Restructuring is the process of taking flaked, sectioned, or chunked meat and binding the pieces to resemble intact cuts of meat. The final products take on a variety of shapes, such as nuggets, roasts, loaves, and steaks. The binder is formed by combining sodium alginate, calcium carbonate, lactic acid, and calcium lactate. When these compounds are added to raw meat pieces, they react to form calcium alginate, the compound that holds the pieces together. All of these substances have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

Pineapple Juice Grade Standards. The Agriculture Department has proposed revisions in its voluntary grade standards for canned pineapple juice to improve them and bring them into line with other revised standards. The major amendments would align U.S. grade standards with Food and Drug Administration standards, eliminate reference to the words "canned" or "canning" and substitute "processing" where appropriate, provide grade standards for pineapple juice from concentrate, establish minimum soluble solids content for pineapple juice from concentrate, and redesignate the grade name U.S. Grade C in the current canned pineapple juice standards to U.S. Grade B.

Sugar Sale to China. USDA sold its entire inventory of 145,850 metric tons of surplus raw cane sugar to the People's Republic of China at 4.75 cents a pound. The sugar was sold at a price that included its delivery on board ship at U.S. export ports and will be delivered during January-March 1987. No credit arrangements were involved in the sale.

Targeted Export Assistance Program for Canned Fruit. A \$5.1 million USDA program to expand exports of canned

peaches and fruit cocktail, especially to Pacific Rim and Middle East countries, will run through fiscal year 1987. The program is intended to help the U.S. industry counter or offset imports of subsidized products from the European Community.

Labeling Meat with Barbecue Sauce. USDA changed its labeling requirements for pork and beef products packed in barbecue sauce to be consistent with those for similar poultry and nonmeat products. Previously, "pork with barbecue sauce" and "beef with barbecue sauce" were the only products on which labels were required to state prominently that the sauce contained thickeners, binders, and similar substances. The new rule allows processors to remove the prominent labeling statements identifying these binding and thickening ingredients.

Meat and Poultry Plant Hours of Operation. USDA now allows qualified meat and poultry processing plants operating under the voluntary Total Quality Control (TQC) inspection system to expand hours per day from 8 to a maximum of 12. Approximately 500 plants use USDA-approved quality control systems to ensure wholesome and accurately labeled products. Under the new rule, plants that have operated under approved TQC systems for at least 1 year can request expansion of daily schedules to 12 hours. During the additional 4 hours of operation, plants can produce and transport products without an inspector being present. Several provisions of the new rule ensure adequate control of the products. For example, special codes are assigned to products processed after the regular 8-hour shift, and inspectors will spot check plants during the expanded hours and take samples when they feel it necessary. □