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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 recent actions.

Inspection and Certification of Peanuts Required

USDA now requires that all peanuts sold for human consumption be inspected and certified.

According to USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), approximately 95 percent of the peanuts sold for human consumption are already inspected and certified under marketing orders for size, quality, and condition. Enacted in December, Public Law 101-220 requires that the remaining 5 percent of the peanut crop be inspected, certified, and tested.

AMS offers inspection and certification services for a fee to peanut handlers. Most handlers now operate under a "Peanut Marketing Agreement" authorized by the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937. Under this arrangement, peanut handlers who have signed the marketing agreement are compensated when tested peanuts are found unsuitable for human consumption because of aflatoxin contamination.

Handlers who have not signed the agreement and whose peanuts must now be tested due to the new law may wish to sign the agreement to take advantage of the indemnification program. Interested handlers may contact the Peanut Administrative Committee, P.O. Box 18856, Lenox Square Station, Atlanta, GA, 30326.

The author is an agricultural economist in the U.S. Agricultural Policy Branch, Agriculture and Trade Analysis Division.

Cheese Replaces Peanut Butter

Due to an increase in the cost of peanuts and a decrease in the cost of cheese, the USDA is substituting cheese for peanut butter on a limited basis in its food assistance programs.

A drought reduced the size of the 1990 peanut crop, meaning fewer peanuts are available for peanut butter. The cost of peanuts increased from less than a dollar per pound last year to approximately \$1.70 per pound. On the other hand, the average price of processed cheese has dropped from approximately \$1.65 to \$1.20 per pound.

According to USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, which oversees the food assistance programs, the replacement makes economic sense because USDA will get the best nutritional value it can for its money.

Cheese was readily available for Federal assistance programs in the early 1980's after high production led to large surpluses. Changes in the dairy price-support programs brought production more in line with demand, and generous donation policies greatly reduced Government-held inventories of cheese. Cheese prices rose sharply. As a result, very little cheese was purchased for Federal programs in fiscal year 1990. In many cases, peanut butter was substituted as an alternative source of protein.

The Nutrition Programs, which include the National School Lunch Program and the Nutrition Program for the Elderly, began receiving cheese in December 1990. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) planned to replace peanut butter with cheese in February 1991. TEFAP gives foods donated by USDA for household use to eligible Americans, including low-income and unemployed persons.

New Food Safety Publication

Many of the approximately 7 million cases of foodborne illness reported each year in the United States result from consumers mishandling food after purchase. Therefore, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service is offering a new publication to inform consumers about safe food handling practices. According to statistics from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, approximately 85 percent of foodborne illness incidents could be avoided by following safe methods for food handling.

The publication, *A Quick Consumer Guide to Safe Food Handling*, was developed after food scientists analyzed consumer handling of food in the home using a scientific method called the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) approach. This system identifies the critical points in everyday food handling where experts say the wrong move could result in foodborne illness.

The publication provides do's and don'ts of safe food handling, emphasizing meat and poultry products. It covers the food safety aspects of food shopping, storage, meal preparation, cooking, microwaving, serving, and handling leftovers.

The guide includes cold storage and cooking temperature charts which list recommended temperatures for meat and poultry products. The cold storage chart details how long a wide variety of perishable foods will last at freezer and refrigerator temperatures. It also offers tips on handling refrigerated and frozen foods during an electrical power outage. Specific information on how to report a case of foodborne illness is given.

For a free copy of *A Quick Consumer Guide to Safe Food Handling*, write to: Consumer Information Center, 574-X, Pueblo, CO 81009.

Consumers with questions about safe food handling can also call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET. Residents of the Washington, DC, area can call (202) 447-3333.

Sharwil Avocados Can Move Interstate from Hawaii

Sharwil avocados may now be shipped to the continental United States from Hawaii without treatment, providing they meet certain harvesting and handling requirements.

The shipping of avocados from Hawaii to the continental United States is regulated to prevent the spread of three insects, the Mediterranean, melon, and Oriental fruit flies. These flies are found in Hawaii but not in other parts of the United States. However, if the Sharwil variety of avocado is picked in compliance with USDA regulations and packed within 24 hours, it is not a host to these fruit flies.

Currently, untreated Sharwil avocados can be shipped to Alaska because of Alaska's colder climate. Since host fruits are not grown in Alaska, there is little risk of fruit-fly infestation. All avocados grown in Hawaii and shipped to States other than Alaska previously had to be treated prior to movement.

James W. Glosser, administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, said that USDA has carefully monitored the movement of Sharwil avocados from Hawaii to Alaska and discovered no violations of the picking and packing requirements. No eggs, larvae, or flies were discovered after the avocados arrived in Alaska. Therefore, USDA now allows untreated Sharwil avocados to be shipped to any State as long as they are harvested and handled under the specified conditions.

Mangoes From Central and South America Allowed Again

USDA has reopened the United States to treated mango imports from Central and South America.

Mango imports from these areas were banned in 1987 because a suitable treatment for fruit flies was no longer avail-



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able. At that time, the Environmental Protection Agency prohibited fumigation with ethylene dibromide, the traditional treatment for killing exotic pests such as fruit flies on mangoes.

USDA's Agricultural Research Service has demonstrated that a procedure for dipping South American mango varieties in hot water kills the larvae and eggs of fruit flies, including the Mediterranean fruit fly.

U.S. markets are now open to all varieties of mangoes from Mexico, Central America, South America, and the West Indies. A hot-water treatment similar to the one now allowed for South American mango varieties had been approved previously for certain other mango varieties imported from the West Indies and Mexico.

Import Restrictions on Chilean Meat and Livestock Eased

USDA has declared Chile free of foot-and-mouth disease and rinderpest, two major cattle diseases, and has issued regulations making the importing of Chilean meat and livestock easier.

Some of the U.S. prohibitions and restrictions on importing meat from Chilean cattle, sheep, and goats have been removed. However, there will still be a number of special restrictions on imports of these meat products, and the current restrictions on swine and pork products will continue.

James W. Glosser, administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspec-

tion Service, expects Chile to export few if any traditional farm animals or meat products. He does foresee the possibility of a new flow of llamas and alpacas coming to the United States. Special health certification, testing, and quarantine requirements have been developed to deal with these animals.

Quarantined animals will undergo laboratory tests for foot-and-mouth disease. Exporters also have to arrange a 60-day pre-embarkation quarantine in Chile. Quarantines in the United States will be reduced from 90 to 40 days, making the quarantine requirements less costly.

Rinderpest and foot-and-mouth disease are viral infections that strike cloven-hoofed animals but neither is a threat to human health. The diseases cause a variety of symptoms leading to reduced productivity, weakness, and often death. Outbreaks of these diseases could have disastrous effects on cattle herds and could raise meat prices in the United States. In addition, if an outbreak were to occur in the United States, we would no longer be considered "free" of these diseases and could lose markets.

In order to be declared free of rinderpest and foot-and-mouth disease, a country must have an effective eradication, control, and surveillance program for these diseases. It also must be free of these diseases for at least 1 year. Chile meets these standards. However, because Chile's neighboring countries are still infected with foot-and-mouth disease, USDA will continue to impose some import restrictions.

Rinderpest has never been known to exist in Chile and constitutes no appreciable risk. The last outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Chile was in August 1987, and Chilean officials have taken precautions against a recurrence of this disease.

Standards for Dried Whey Revised

USDA now permits salty whey, the moisture removed from cheese curd as a result of salting, to be covered by U.S. whey standards. The standards will apply to the whey after its salt has been removed.

Dried and condensed whey are significant sources of vitamins and protein in

human nutrition, and are also used to some extent in animal feed.

Only whey originating as saltless was eligible for U.S. grading. This type of whey results from the initial coagulation of milk protein into cheese curd at the start of cheesemaking. This is the major source of whey for processing.

In the past, the salty whey was discarded because it was too salty. Improved whey prices and increased whey disposal costs have improved the economics of removing the salt. Membrane technology, using a process of osmosis, can economically remove salt from whey. The desalinated whey can be sold as sweet whey.

The Agricultural Marketing Service is authorized to approve desalination methods for handlers seeking USDA approval of the whey-handling facilities. Collection of this whey must meet certain sanitary requirements.

Low-Fat Patties in the School Lunch Program

USDA plans to purchase new low-fat beef patties for use in the National School Lunch Program.

Meat industry research projects have developed palatable beef patties containing just 10 percent fat. USDA is attempting to move this technology from the laboratory into the packing plant to provide a leaner beef product to school children. Beef patties that are served in the school lunch programs average approximately 20 to 22 percent fat. The fat content of these products is already lower than in many commercial products, but the development of low-fat patties would be a substantial improvement.

USDA conducts a trial purchase in a two-step bidding procedure. First, USDA solicits and evaluates proposals and samples from interested suppliers. Second, producers of the product that USDA finds acceptable are invited to submit sealed bids to sell up to 79,200 pounds of their product for distribution to pre-selected schools.

Imported Fruits From Chile

USDA has amended its regulations to allow stonefruit (apricots, nectarines,

peaches, and plums) to be imported from Chile based on pre-clearance inspections, as long as certain precautions are taken. Previously, imports had to be fumigated. Fumigated imports will continue to be allowed.

Precautions include inspecting the fruit in Chile, and covering all shipments completely with tarpaulins or enclosing them in containers or sealed trucks during movement from the inspection facility to the vessel or aircraft.

Activities to determine the eligibility of fruit shipments to the United States are called "pre-clearance" to distinguish them from similar inspections, treatments, and other procedures performed by Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) inspectors at U.S. ports of arrival. Inspections conducted in Chile are comparable in effectiveness to inspections at the U.S. ports of entry.

These pre-clearance inspections are performed under the direction of USDA APHIS inspectors in Chile and are carried out either by APHIS inspectors or by inspectors of the national plant protection service of Chile in the presence of APHIS inspectors. In most cases, fruit pre-cleared in Chile does not require reinspection at U.S. ports.

Ohio and Idaho Free of Cattle Tuberculosis

USDA declared Ohio and Idaho free of cattle tuberculosis, making cattle from these States more marketable domestically and internationally.

A State must be free of bovine tuberculosis for 5 years in order to be accredited. Ohio's last infected herd was slaughtered in 1985, Idaho's last, in 1984.

Both States have maintained active programs to identify cattle so that any infected animal can be traced back to its herd of origin. The surveillance programs were supported by the livestock industry, State officials, the veterinary profession, and many other organizations.

Kansas and Oklahoma Not Free of Cattle Tuberculosis

USDA has removed cattle tuberculosis-free status from Kansas and Oklahoma. Both States had been declared "free" in 1984.

The bovine tuberculosis accredited-free status of both States was rescinded when several infected herds were found. The source of one of the Kansas infections is unknown of yet. The other cases originated from a single infected Oklahoma herd that was dispersed in 1988.

Officials in both States say that they are arranging to have all infected and exposed herds slaughtered. If a State has previously been declared "free" it can regain free status once it remains free of infection for 2 years after the last infected herd is slaughtered.

With the addition of Ohio and Idaho and the loss of Kansas and Oklahoma, 41 States plus the Virgin Islands are considered "free" of cattle tuberculosis.

Idaho Declared Free of Cattle Brucellosis

USDA declared Idaho free of cattle brucellosis. Idaho is considered free of brucellosis because no cattle herds were found to be infected with the disease for 12 consecutive months and the State met all other program requirements.

Cattle owners in "free" States benefit by no longer having to test their animals for brucellosis before they are sold. Savings will amount to more than \$300,000 per year in Idaho.

Brucellosis causes abortion, reduced fertility, and lower milk yields in cattle. Nationwide, cattle producers still incur annual production losses of more than \$12 million from brucellosis. Humans can be infected by drinking unpasteurized milk from infected animals or by handling aborted fetuses from brucellosis-infected animals.

With the addition of Idaho, 30 States and the U.S. Virgin Islands are now free of this costly disease of cattle.

Fewer than 1,000 herds are still under quarantine for brucellosis in the United States. In the early 1930's when the eradication efforts first started, 5 percent of the Nation's cattle herds were estimated to be infected with brucellosis. This dropped to 124,000 herds in the late 1950's, and down to 7,074 herds in 1980. ■