

Proposed Rules

Federal Register

Vol. 64, No. 111

Thursday, June 10, 1999

This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains notices to the public of the proposed issuance of rules and regulations. The purpose of these notices is to give interested persons an opportunity to participate in the rule making prior to the adoption of the final rules.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 981

[Docket No. FV99-981-2 PR]

Almonds Grown in California; Revisions to Requirements Regarding Credit for Promotion and Advertising Activities

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: This rule invites comments on revising the requirements regarding credit for promotion and advertising activities prescribed under the administrative rules and regulations of the California almond marketing order (order). The order regulates the handling of almonds grown in California and is administered locally by the Almond Board of California (Board). The order is funded through the collection of assessments from almond handlers. Under the terms of the regulations, handlers may receive credit towards their assessment obligation for certain expenditures for marketing promotion activities, including paid advertising. This rule would revise the requirements regarding the activities for which handlers may receive such credit. The changes would make the promotion program more effective and efficient, clarify the regulations, and improve program administration.

DATES: Comments must be received by July 12, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit written comments concerning this proposal. Comments must be sent to the Docket Clerk, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456; Fax: (202) 720-5698; or E-mail: moab.docketclerk@usda.gov. All comments should reference the docket number and the date and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register** and

will be made available for public inspection in the Office of the Docket Clerk during regular business hours.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Martin Engeler, Assistant Regional Manager, California Marketing Field Office, Marketing Order Administration Branch, F&V, AMS, USDA, 2202 Monterey Street, suite 102B, Fresno, California 93721; telephone: (559) 487-5901, Fax: (559) 487-5906; or George Kelhart, Technical Advisor, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456; telephone: (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-5698. Small businesses may request information on complying with this regulation, or obtain a guide on complying with fruit, vegetable, and specialty crop marketing agreements and orders by contacting Jay Guerber, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, P.O. Box 96456, room 2525-S, Washington, DC 20090-6456; telephone (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-5698, or E-mail: Jay.Guerber@usda.gov. You may view the marketing agreement and order small business compliance guide at the following web site: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This proposal is issued under Marketing Order No. 981, as amended (7 CFR part 981), regulating the handling of almonds grown in California, hereinafter referred to as the "order." The marketing order is effective under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, as amended (7 U.S.C. 601-674), hereinafter referred to as the "Act."

The Department of Agriculture (Department) is issuing this rule in conformance with Executive Order 12866.

This rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. This rule is not intended to have retroactive effect. This rule will not preempt any State or local laws, regulations, or policies, unless they present an irreconcilable conflict with this rule.

The Act provides that administrative proceedings must be exhausted before parties may file suit in court. Under section 608c(15)(A) of the Act, any handler subject to an order may file with the Secretary a petition stating that the order, any provision of the order, or

any obligation imposed in connection with the order is not in accordance with law and request a modification of the order or to be exempted therefrom. A handler is afforded the opportunity for a hearing on the petition. After the hearing the Secretary would rule on the petition. The Act provides that the district court of the United States in any district in which the handler is an inhabitant, or has his or her principal place of business, has jurisdiction to review the Secretary's ruling on the petition, provided an action is filed not later than 20 days after the date of the entry of the ruling.

This proposal invites comments on revising the requirements regarding credit for promotion and advertising activities prescribed under the administrative rules and regulations of the order. The order is funded through the collection of assessments from almond handlers. Under the terms of the regulations, handlers may receive credit towards their assessment obligation for certain expenditures for marketing promotion activities, including paid advertising. This rule would revise the requirements regarding the activities for which handlers may receive such credit. It would provide for more effective promotion programs and improved clarity to the regulations, resulting in improved program administration and more efficient and effective use of industry promotion funds. This proposal was unanimously recommended by the Board at meetings on December 2, 1998, and March 5, 1999.

The order provides authority for the Board to incur expenses for administering the order and to collect assessments from handlers to cover these expenses. Section 981.41(a) provides authority for the Board to conduct marketing promotion projects, including projects involving paid advertising. Section 989.41(c) allows the Board to credit a handler's assessment obligation with all or a portion of his or her direct expenditures for marketing promotion, including paid advertising, that promotes the sale of almonds, almond products, or their uses. Section 981.41(e) allows the Board to prescribe rules and regulations regarding such credit for market promotion including paid advertising activities. Those regulations are prescribed in § 981.441.

The Board has proposed the following changes to those regulations.

Revising Time Frames for Submitting Documentation

Section 981.441(a) provides that, in order for handlers to receive credit against their assessment obligation for their own promotional expenditures, the Board must determine that such expenditures meet applicable requirements. Currently, credit may be granted in the form of a payment from the Board, or as an offset to the Board's assessment if activities are conducted and documented to the satisfaction of the Board at least 2 weeks prior to assessment billings. This 2-week period is also currently specified in § 981.441(e)(6)(ii). Assessments are typically billed in four installments for a crop year near the end of the following months—November, January, April, and August.

Based on past experience with the program, the majority of handlers file claims for credit for their promotional activities during the later months of a crop year. The vast majority of claims are thus received at the Board offices near the third and fourth filing deadlines. Because of this, the Board's staff has found that it needs more time to review and process handler documentation for promotional claims submitted during this time to grant credit against handlers' assessment obligations at the time assessment notices are issued. Thus, the Board recommended that, in order for handlers to receive credit for their promotional activities on their third and fourth assessment billings (April and August), the documentation for such activities must be submitted to the Board three weeks, rather than two weeks, prior to those billings. Appropriate changes are proposed to paragraphs (a) and (e)(6)(ii) of § 981.441.

Section 981.441(e)(6)(iv) currently provides that final claims for credit-back advertising be submitted to the Board within 105 days after the close of the crop year, in situations when handlers have filed a statement of credit-back commitments outstanding as of the close of the crop year. The Board recommended changing this 105-day time frame for several reasons. First, the deadline can cause confusion among handlers because it overlaps with the time frame for filing the first claims of the new crop year. In addition, the overlap creates program administration problems for Board staff with regard to reviewing claims and applying credit for two separate years during the same time period. Finally, the current deadline causes a delay in completion of the

Board's year-end accounting practices and annual financial audit. Thus, the Board recommended that this deadline be reduced from 105 to 76 days after the close of the end of the crop year. This would eliminate confusion and program administration problems associated with the overlap period for filing claims, and would allow the Board's end-of-year financial audit to be completed by December or earlier of the following crop year, as opposed to January or later. Section 981.441(e)(6)(iv) is proposed to be modified accordingly.

When handlers have not filed a statement of credit-back commitments outstanding at the close of a crop year, the deadline for filing final promotional claims with the Board is two weeks prior to the final assessment notice (mid-August). However, this deadline date is not clearly specified in the current regulations and has caused some confusion in the past. Therefore, the Board recommended establishing August 15 as the deadline for filing final claims in this situation. This would provide more clarity and reduce confusion regarding the deadline for filing final claims. Section 981.441(e)(6)(iv) is proposed to be modified accordingly.

Redefining Growing Region

Section 981.441(e)(3) currently does not generally allow handlers to receive credit against their assessment obligation for outdoor advertising or sponsorships that are conducted in the major growing regions of California. The major growing regions currently listed in the regulation are the following 11 almond-growing counties: Butte, Colusa, Fresno, Glenn, Kern, Madera, Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare counties. The rationale for this exclusion is that historically, much of the outdoor advertising and sponsorship activities in the major growing areas have been to encourage growers to do business with specific handlers rather than encouraging consumption of almonds. This is contrary to the intent of this program, which is to promote the sale, consumption, or use of almonds.

The Board recommended removing this list of counties from the regulations and adding substitute language. Production and new acreage planted in the almond industry have increased significantly in recent years, and production areas have been shifting within the State. The current regulations do not take this into account, and the aforementioned list of counties no longer accurately reflects the major growing areas.

The Board believes a more flexible approach would be to revise the regulations to specify that no credit be given for outdoor advertising activities conducted in any California county with more than 1,000 bearing acres of almonds. This approach would adequately define the major growing regions, and accommodate production shifts in the future. This would, in effect, remove Sacramento County as a major growing area and would thus allow outdoor advertising in that county. Sacramento County contains a major metropolitan area, which lends itself to the use of outdoor advertising, and is a minor almond growing area, with only 110 acres compared to an industry total of over 400,000 acres. The other 10 counties listed above would continue to be regions ineligible for this type of credit. Other counties with significant almond acreage such as Kings, San Luis Obispo, Solano, Sutter, Tehama, Yolo, and Yuba would also be classified as major almond growing areas under the proposal, and outdoor advertising in those counties, would, thus, be considered ineligible for credit-back.

The Board further believes that modifying the regulations in this manner would better reflect the original intent of the regulation, and would allow more flexibility for shifts in production within the growing area. Section 981.441(e)(3) is proposed to be modified accordingly. The Board also recommended that sponsorship be completely eliminated as a credit-back activity; this recommendation is discussed below.

Revisions to List of Credit-Back Activities

Section 981.441(e)(4)(ii) lists 13 other market promotion activities for which credit may be granted. These activities currently include marketing research (except pre-testing and test-marketing of paid advertising); trade and consumer product publicity; printing costs for promotional material; direct mail printing and distribution; retail in-store demonstrations; point-of-sale materials (not including packaging); sales and marketing presentation kits; trade fairs and exhibits; trade seminars; 50/50 advertising with retailers; couponing (printing, distribution, and handling costs only); purchase of Board-produced promotional materials; and sponsorships.

The Board recommended revising the requirements regarding trade and consumer product publicity. Trade and consumer product publicity includes disseminating information through various communications media to

attract public attention. Handlers often hire an outside agency to conduct such activities. Usually, such an agency charges a fee for its work. In the past, this agency fee has been included as part of the credit-back activity, as agency fees for paid advertising are. However, in the case of trade and consumer product publicity, the Board has encountered difficulties in associating agency fees to particular credit-back activities, and determining whether this fee is appropriate, because there is no standard fee or guidelines for such fees. For paid advertising, this does not pose a problem because there is a standard agency fee that can easily be associated directly to a particular activity. Thus, the Board recommended that agency fees for publicity no longer be included as a credit-back activity. All of the other allowable activities associated with publicity (such as materials) which can be directly tied to a specific publicity campaign would still be eligible for credit.

The Board also recommended that trade seminars be removed from this list of credit-back activities. Trade seminars include special events designed to educate the trade about the almond industry and its products. Although Board records indicate there has been no use of this area as a credit-back activity by handlers, the Board believes that there is a high possibility of misuse in this area. Trade seminars are not well defined and standardized activities; thus, lavish entertainment or elaborate sales meetings could be characterized as trade seminars. Trade shows will remain as a credit-back activity, however. These events are widely used and the activities are well-defined and standardized, such as setting up booths to exhibit merchandise to customers. Thus, the Board recommended that trade seminars be removed from the list of credit-back activities.

The Board also recommended that handlers' purchases of Board-produced promotional materials be removed from the list of credit-back activities. Board funds are used to develop various promotional materials that are made available to handlers. In the past, handlers could purchase such materials from the Board and receive promotion credit. However, the Board has recently developed an allocation system whereby handlers may receive a certain percentage of promotional material produced by the Board free of charge. Each handler's allocation for a crop year is based on the percentage of almonds handled during the prior year. Handlers may purchase additional material at cost. This new system, not covered by the credit-back regulations, allows

Board staff to plan more effectively and to purchase materials more cost effectively, while maintaining a promotional tool for handlers. Since this new system was developed, the Board determined that continuing to allow credit for purchase of Board-produced promotional material would result in overlap of two similar programs. Therefore, the Board recommended that purchase of such material be removed from the list of credit-back activities.

In addition, the Board recommended that sponsorship be removed from the list of credit-back activities. Sponsorship includes the financial support of an event or person carried out by another group or person. Sponsorship can be targeted towards consumers, the trade, or may be undertaken for general goodwill. A review of sponsorship claims submitted in the past indicates several claims appear to fall into the category of general goodwill rather than to promote the sale and consumption of almonds as the primary purpose. Further, Board staff has had difficulty in determining a reasonable rate for crediting some of the activities due to a lack of an industry standard. Finally, Board staff has found that many of the most effective activities typically claimed as sponsorship can be applicable under other credit-back areas in the regulations. Thus, the Board recommended that sponsorship be removed from the list of credit-back activities.

The Board also recommended that a new credit-back activity be added to the regulations concerning use of the Internet. Several handlers have or are developing web-sites to promote their almonds. This is a rapidly developing communication medium becoming widely recognized as a valuable promotional tool. Thus, the Board believes handlers should be allowed credit for development and use of the Internet for promotional purposes. Because of the vast array of uses of the Internet, however, the Board believes guidelines should be implemented regarding crediting handlers' expenditures in this area. Thus, the Board recommended that handlers be allowed up to \$5,000 credit against their assessment obligation for the development and use of a web-site on the Internet for advertising and public relations purposes. No credit would be given for costs regarding E-commerce (which is equivalent to opening a store), Extranet (private web sites within the Internet), or portions of a web-site that target the farming or grower trade. The Board believes these types of activities lend themselves to potential abuses and may not necessarily advance the intent

of the program, which is to promote the sale, use, and consumption of almonds.

Appropriate changes are proposed to be made to the list of credit-back activities specified in § 981.441(e)(4)(ii) to incorporate all of these changes.

Recommendation Regarding Credit-Back for Almond Products

Section 981.441(a) specifies that handlers may be granted credit against their assessment obligation for an amount not to exceed 66⅔ percent of a handler's proven expenditures for qualified activities. Section 981.441(e)(iv) provides that when products containing almonds are promoted, the amount allowed for Credit-Back shall reflect that portion of the product weight represented by almonds, or the handler's actual payment, whichever is less. For example, if a handler paid \$1,000 in advertising costs to promote a product which contained 60 percent almonds by weight, such handler would be able to file a claim for credit against his or her assessment obligation of 60 percent of \$1,000, or \$600. The amount of credit would be 66⅔ percent of \$600, or \$400. If the product contained 70 percent almonds by weight, the handler would be eligible to receive a credit against his or her assessment of 66⅔ percent of the 70 percent, or \$467.

The Board recommended adding an exception to this portion of the regulations. Specifically, handlers who own almond-containing "unique" or "non-traditional" products would be allowed to request that the Board grant them a one-year exemption from this "percentage rule." Thus, in the above example, a handler could request from the Board an exemption and receive credit for 66⅔ percent of his or her advertising costs for the product, or \$667, regardless of the weight of the almonds in the product. The Board believes that this special exception would provide handlers incentive to produce and advertise unique almond products, resulting in increased almond sales for the industry. The Board members would be responsible for reviewing such requests from handlers and determining whether an exception would be granted on a case-by-case basis.

The Department has concerns with this recommendation. Although there was support for this concept at the industry meetings which led to the recommendations, those participating in the meetings were not able to develop criteria to define a "unique" or "non-traditional" product. Thus, there would be no specific parameters for Board staff to review claims against. Because of

this, the recommendation calls for the Board itself, rather than staff, to determine what products would qualify (Board staff currently reviews all promotion claims). It is unclear how the Board would make such determinations. The lack of criteria could potentially lead to subjective decision making and Board members reviewing claims could create potential conflicts of interest. The purpose of these regulations is to provide a clear set of guidelines that can be applied uniformly by Board staff to avoid these situations. While the Department supports the concept of providing incentive for new product development, it is not proceeding with this recommendation at this time because of the aforementioned concerns.

Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

Pursuant to requirements set forth in the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has considered the economic impact of this action on small entities.

Accordingly, AMS has prepared this initial regulatory flexibility analysis.

The purpose of the RFA is to fit regulatory actions to the scale of business subject to such actions in order that small businesses will not be unduly or disproportionately burdened. Marketing orders issued pursuant to the Act, and rules issued thereunder, are unique in that they are brought about through group action of essentially small entities acting on their own behalf. Thus, both statutes have small entity orientation and compatibility.

There are approximately 105 handlers of California almonds who are subject to regulation under the order and approximately 6,000 almond producers in the regulated area. Small agricultural service firms have been defined by the Small Business Administration (13 CFR 121.601) as those having annual receipts of less than \$5,000,000, and small agricultural producers are defined as those having annual receipts of less than \$500,000.

Based on the most current data available, about 54 percent of the handlers ship under \$5,000,000 worth of almonds and 46 percent ship over \$5,000,000 worth on an annual basis. In addition, based on acreage, production, and grower prices reported by the National Agricultural Statistics Service, and the total number of almond growers, the average annual grower revenue is approximately \$195,000. In view of the foregoing, it can be concluded that the majority of handlers and producers of California almonds may be classified as small entities.

This rule would revise § 981.441 of the order's administrative rules and

regulations regarding credit-back promotion and advertising. Under the terms of the regulations, handlers may receive credit towards their assessment obligation for certain of their direct expenditures for marketing promotion activities, including paid advertising. This rule would make several revisions to the requirements regarding the activities for which handlers may receive such credit. These revisions include: Revising the time frames and clarifying deadlines for when handlers must submit documentation to the Board on activities conducted; redefining the growing region eligible for credit for certain types of outdoor advertising; revising the list of creditable activities by eliminating credit for fees charged by advertising and public relations agencies for publicity, trade seminars, purchase of Board-produced promotional material, and sponsorships; and adding use of the Internet as a promotional tool as a new, credit-back activity.

Regarding the impact of this rule on affected entities, the changes proposed herein are designed to provide for a more effective and efficient use of the industry's advertising and promotion funds, and to improve program administration. Requiring handlers to submit documentation to the Board 3 weeks, as opposed to 2 weeks, prior to the Board's April and August assessment billings would change the timing, but not the frequency, of the filings submitted by handlers. This change is not expected to increase the reporting burden on handlers, but rather provide the Board's staff sufficient time to review the material and credit handlers' accounts in a more timely manner. Clarifying the deadline for filing claims at the end of a crop year would eliminate confusion among handlers and would allow the Board to complete its year end accounting practices more timely. Redefining the growing region eligible for credit for outdoor advertising to include only counties with less than 1,000 bearing acres of almonds would help ensure that credit only be given for outdoor advertising that encourages consumers to buy almonds (as opposed to such advertising done in larger bearing counties directing growers to specific handlers). It would also add flexibility to the regulations to accommodate production shifts in the future. Adding the Internet as a credit-back activity would allow handlers to take advantage of a new communication medium and to provide them with a new promotional opportunity that can be used to offset a portion of their assessment obligation.

Removing certain activities available for credit-back is not expected to negatively impact handlers, as numerous promotional activities remain for them to offset a portion of their assessment obligation. The activities proposed to be removed have received little use in the past, and in some cases lend themselves to potential abuses that result in ineffective use of promotional funds. The changes proposed are expected to be equally beneficial to all handlers who conduct their own promotional activities and to the industry as a whole.

Several alternatives to the proposed changes were considered. The first alternative in all cases is to leave the regulations as they currently exist. However, this does not address the changes in the industry, technology, or promotional practices. Nor does it address the administrative inefficiencies and the potential program abuses that have been identified. Alternatives to the recommendations concerning removing certain activities from the list of credit-back activities included leaving the activities in the regulations, with further definition and clarification added. However, it was determined that this would lead to increased regulations and guidelines, with no assurance of solving the problems. In addition, most of the activities being removed have been used very infrequently by handlers. The removal of credit for purchase of Board-produced promotional materials was replaced by an alternative system whereby handlers are provided a free allocation of such materials, with the option of purchasing additional materials at cost.

Regarding the changing of dates for submitting documents to the Board, different dates were considered. However, it was determined that the dates ultimately recommended would allow the minimum amount of time necessary for Board staff to review documents, apply credit to handlers' assessment accounts, and to complete year-end accounting practices in a timely manner. Alternatives to changing the growing region definition included using a different acreage number as a threshold to defining a producing county. However, the industry agreed for purposes of the credit-back program, 1,000 acres was appropriate. Another alternative considered removing the restriction of outdoor advertising in almond growing counties, but that does not address the problem of handlers advertising to growers.

It was determined that the proposed changes are the best way to address the situation at this time. These regulations were designed to reflect the industry's practices, and these proposed revisions

are intended to respond to an evolving marketplace and changing promotional practices. Changes have been and will continue to be recommended based on industry and program experiences.

This rule would not impose any additional reporting or recordkeeping requirements on either small or large almond handlers. In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the information collection requirements that are contained in this rule have been previously approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and have been assigned OMB No. 0581-0071. As with all Federal marketing order programs, reports and forms are periodically reviewed to reduce information requirements and duplication by industry and public sector agencies. Finally, the Department has not identified any relevant Federal rules that duplicate, overlap or conflict with this rule.

Additionally, the Board's meeting was widely publicized throughout the almond industry and all interested persons were invited to attend the meetings and participate in Board deliberations. Like all Board meetings, the December 2, 1998, and March 5, 1999, meetings were public meetings and all entities, both large and small, were able to express their views on this issue. The Board itself is composed of 10 members, of which 5 are producers and 5 are handlers.

Also, the Board has a number of appointed committees to review certain issues and make recommendations to the Board. The Board formed a task force in July 1998 to review its credit-back advertising program. The task force met periodically during the following months to review the program and consider appropriate changes. The task force presented its recommendations to the Board's Public Relations and Advertising Committee on November 13, 1998, and that committee presented its recommendations to the Board on December 2, 1998. The March 5, 1999, meeting was held to finalize the Board's recommendations. All of these meetings were open to the public, and both large and small entities were able to participate and express their views. Finally, interested persons are invited to submit information on the regulatory and informational impacts of this action on small businesses.

A 30-day comment period is provided to allow interested parties to respond to this proposal. Thirty days is deemed appropriate because any changes

resulting from this proposed rule need to be in place prior to the beginning of the 1999-2000 crop year, which begins on August 1, 1999, so handlers can be given adequate notice to plan their promotional activities accordingly. All written comments received timely will be considered before a final determination is made on this matter.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 981

Almonds, Marketing agreements, Nuts, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, 7 CFR part 981 is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 981—ALMONDS GROWN IN CALIFORNIA

1. The authority citation for 7 CFR part 981 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 601-674.

2. Section 981.441 is amended by revising the second sentence in paragraph (a), paragraphs (e)(3), (e)(4)(ii), the first sentence in paragraph (e)(6)(ii), and paragraph (e)(6)(iv) to read as follows:

§ 981.441 Credit for market promotion activities, including paid advertising.

(a) * * * Credit will be granted either in the form of a payment from the Board, or as an offset to the assessment if activities are conducted and documented to the satisfaction of the Board at least 2 weeks prior to the Board's first and second assessment billings, and at least 3 weeks prior to the Board's third and fourth assessment billings in a crop year. * * *

* * * * *

(e) * * *

(3) No Credit-Back will be given for advertising placed in publications that target the farming or grower trade. No Credit-Back shall be given for any outdoor advertising in California almond growing counties with more than 1,000 bearing acres: *Provided*, That outdoor advertising in these counties which specifically directs consumers to a handler-operated outlet offering direct purchase of almonds will be eligible for Credit-Back.

(4) * * *

(ii) *Other market promotion activities.* Credit-Back shall be granted for market promotion other than paid advertising, for the following activities:

(A) Marketing research (except pre-testing and test-marketing of paid advertising);

(B) Trade and consumer product publicity: *Provided*, That no Credit-Back shall be given for related fees charged by an advertising or public relations agency;

(C) Printing costs for promotional material;

(D) Direct mail printing and distribution;

(E) Retail in-store demonstrations;

(F) Point-of-sale materials (not including packaging);

(G) Sales and marketing presentation kits;

(H) Trade fairs and exhibits;

(I) 50/50 advertising with retailers;

(J) Couponing (printing, distribution, and handling costs only); and

(K) Development and use of web-site on the Internet for advertising and public relations purposes; *Provided*, That Credit-Back shall be limited to \$5,000 per year, and no credit shall be given for costs for E-commerce (mail ordering through the Internet), Extranet (restricted web sites within the Internet), or portions of a web-site that target the farming or grower trade.

* * * * *

(6) * * *

(ii) Handlers may receive credit against their assessment obligation up to the advertising amount of the assessment installment due: *Provided*, That handlers submit the required documentation for a qualified activity at least 2 weeks prior to the mailing of the Board's first and second assessment notices, and at least 3 weeks prior to the mailing of the Board's third and fourth assessment notices in a crop year. * * *

(iii) * * *

(iv) A statement of the Credit-Back commitments outstanding as of the close of a crop year must be submitted in full to the Board within 15 days after the close of that crop year. Final claims pertaining to such commitments outstanding must be submitted within 76 days after the close of that crop year. All other final claims for which no statement of Credit-Back commitments outstanding has been filed must be submitted by August 15 of that calendar year.

* * * * *

Dated: June 4, 1999.

Robert C. Keeney,

Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.

[FR Doc. 99-14690 Filed 6-9-99; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-02-P