

Notices

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

United States Standards for Grades of Canned Beets, United States Standards for Grades of Canned Carrots and the United States Standards for Grades of Canned White Potatoes

[FV-97-329N]

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) is soliciting comments on its proposal to change the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Beets, the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Carrots, and the United States Standards for Grades of Canned White Potatoes (canned root crop vegetables). Specifically, USDA is proposing to adjust the Recommended Minimum Drained Weight Averages (RMDWA's) for all styles packed in No. 300 size cans to be equivalent to the percent water capacity corresponding to the closest sized container, the No. 303 can, i.e., reduced by 9.02 percent. These changes are being requested by industry in order to improve the useability of the U.S. standards for these canned root crop vegetables. In addition, USDA will further improve the standards and promote consistency by changing the format of the tables to incorporate a column for the water capacity of each container size and add metric system tables to the canned beets and canned carrots standards.

DATES: Comments must be submitted on or before March 16, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Written comments may be submitted to Chere L. Shorter, Processed Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture,

Room 0709, South Building; STOP 0247, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456; faxed to (202) 690-1087; or e-mailed to

Chere_L_Shorter@usda.gov.

Comments should reference the date and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register**. All comments received will be made available for public inspection at the above address during regular business hours (8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.).

The current U.S. grade standards for these canned root crop vegetables, along with the proposed changes, are available either through the above addresses or by accessing AMS's Home Page on the Internet at www.ams.usda.gov/standards/vegcan.htm.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Chere L. Shorter at (202) 720-4693.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 203(c) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, as amended, directs and authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture "to develop and improve standards of quality, condition, quantity, grade, and packaging and recommend and demonstrate such standards in order to encourage uniformity and consistency in commercial practices * * *". AMS is committed to carrying out this authority in a manner that facilitates the marketing of agricultural commodities and makes copies of official standards available upon request. The United States Standards for Grades of Canned Beets, the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Carrots, and the United States Standards for Grades of Canned White Potatoes (canned root crop vegetables) do not appear in the Code of Federal Regulations but are maintained by USDA.

AMS is proposing to change the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Beets, the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Carrots, and the United States Standards for Grades of Canned White Potatoes using the procedures it published in the August 13, 1997, **Federal Register** and that appear in part 36 of Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (7 CFR part 36).

In November 1993, USDA received a request to review the RMDWA's for these canned root crops in No. 300 size containers from the National Food Processors Association's (NFPA)'s Grade Standards Review Subcommittee. NFPA requested the changes in the United

States Standards for Grades of Canned Beets; Canned Carrots; and Canned White Potatoes.

NFPA is a scientifically and technically-based trade association representing over 550 food industry companies.¹ NFPA requested that the recommended drained weight of the No. 300 size container be reviewed for all styles of canned root crop vegetables. Within the last few years the canning industry has been replacing production of the No. 303 container size with the No. 300 container. The total water capacity for the No. 300 container is less than the total water capacity for a No. 303 container. The percentage water capacity, on which the recommended minimum drained weight average is based, is calculated by dividing the RMDWA for a particular style of canned root crop vegetable by the total water capacity of the container. Studies done by the USDA have found that for every style of canned root crop vegetable under consideration, in the current U.S. standards, the drained weight as a percentage of the water capacity is significantly more for the No. 300 container than for No. 303 containers, even though the available capacity of the No. 300 container is 9.02 percent less than that of the No. 303 container.

NFPA states that several companies are noting difficulty in meeting the RMDWA requirements for these products in the No. 300 cans. In some instances, critical fill weight maximums have been exceeded, causing companies to reevaluate their thermal processing schedules to be sure their product is sterile. Some companies are targeting lower than the RMDWA's. One effect of targeting too low is that production may not meet the buyers' specifications for the RMDWA's because there may be a high percentage of slack filled cans. This situation may result in a demand from buyers for a discount in price. To meet USDA requirements for drained weight, processors, by putting more product into the can than may be necessary, have sustained economic hardship, damage to the product, and sometimes loss of the integrity to the can seal. When the seal's integrity is lost during processing, the product's wholesomeness is jeopardized.

The remedies recommended by NFPA propose that the RMDWA's in the U.S.

¹ Source—USDA, NASS, ASB.

standards for grades of canned beets; canned carrots; and canned white potatoes be reduced to the same percentage water capacity offered in the No. 303 container size, i.e. lowered by 9.02 percent. The No. 303 can size was chosen because the size relationship is closest to the No. 300 can. In consideration of this proposal, the Standardization Section of the Processed Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, initiated a study to review the current grade standards for canned root crop vegetables packed in No. 300 containers. Several companies were asked to submit data on drained weight for the two most prevalent styles of each canned root crop vegetable under consideration, mainly sliced and whole beets, diced and sliced carrots and sliced and whole potatoes. Seven PPB area field offices also collected samples and determined drained weight measurements for these commodities. The independent findings provided a cross-sectional representation of the marketplace and served as a benchmark for industry data. The drained weight data provided by the industry and by AMS for the No. 300 containers were then combined and examined. In 1996 the data and conclusions were published in a report on file with USDA titled, "Drained Weight Study, 1995 Report on Proposal to Lower Recommended Minimum Drained Weights for Root Vegetables Packed in No. 300 Containers."

The conclusions of the report do substantiate that there is some merit in the industry proposal to decrease the recommended minimum drained weights in the U.S. grade standards for canned beets; carrots; and white potatoes packed in No. 300 containers. Currently, the percentage water capacity, which is the ratio of the RMDWA and the water capacity of a container, is significantly higher in all cases for the smaller No. 300 container than for the No. 303 containers. For example, in diced beets, the RMDWA for the No. 300 container is 10.0 ounces, and the RMDWA for the No. 303 container is 10.5 ounces. The percent water capacity represented by 10.0 ounces is 65.8 percent, while 10.5 ounces represents a percent water capacity of only 62.3 percent.

Based on this information USDA has found that new RMDWA's for No. 300 containers, making the percentage water capacities more consistent with those of the No. 303 containers, should be considered.

Based on these findings, AMS agrees with the recommendations from NFPA and proposes to improve the United States Standards for Grades of Canned

Beets; Canned Carrots; and Canned White Potatoes by making changes to and adding the following tables: Canned Beets, Table I, adding Table IA, Canned Carrots, Table I, adding Table IA, and Canned White Potatoes, Table I and Table IA. Specifically, the changes will: (1) adjust the RMDWA's for No. 300 containers which were calculated using the percentage water capacity corresponding to No. 303 containers and lowered accordingly by 9.02 percent of the RMDWA of the 303 size container; and further improve the standards and promote consistency by (2) changing the format to include tables that will incorporate the water capacity of each container size; and (3) adding metric system tables to the canned beet and canned carrot standards.

These changes, if adopted, would improve the grade standards by making RMDWA's proportional for the No. 300 can size, ensure safety of the product, and help to facilitate the marketing of canned beets, carrots and white potatoes, allowing a more equitable marketing environment for the canning industry. The affected trade has recommended and reviewed these changes, therefore AMS is publishing this notice with a 60 day comment period which will provide sufficient amount of time for interested persons to comment on changes to the standards.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 1621-1627.

Dated: January 9, 1998.

Robert C. Keeney,

Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

[FV-97-328N]

United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is soliciting comments on its proposal to change the voluntary United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes. Specifically, AMS proposes to lower the recommended drained weights for canned sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans by two percent. AMS has received petitions to revise the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes. The petitioners are

requesting a decrease in the recommended drained weight for sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans including No. 10 cans. The drained weight recommendations would also add No. 300 cans, a size pack which has been increasingly utilized in the industry. These changes would allow more equitable utilization of processed sweetpotatoes across domestic growing regions and will help the sweetpotato industry to meet its market needs.

DATES: Comments must be submitted on or before March 16, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit their written comments to Karen L. Kaufman, Processed Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, STOP 0247, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090-6456; faxed to (202) 690-1087; or e-mailed to Karen_L_Kaufman@usda.gov.

Comments should reference the date and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register**. The petitions and comments will be made available for public inspection at the above address during regular business hours.

The current United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes, along with the proposed changes, are available through the above addresses or by accessing AMS's Home Page on the Internet at: www.ams.usda.gov/standards/vegcan.htm.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Karen L. Kaufman at (202) 720-5021.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 203(c) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, as amended, directs and authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture "to develop and improve standards of quality, condition, grade, and packaging and recommend and demonstrate such standards in order to encourage uniformity and consistency in commercial practices * * *". The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is committed to carrying out this authority in a manner that facilitates the marketing of agricultural commodities. The United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes do not appear in the Code of Federal Regulations but are maintained by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Copies of official standards are available upon request.

AMS is proposing to change the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes using the procedures it published in the August 13, 1997, **Federal Register** and that appear in part 36 of title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (7 CFR part 36). Specifically, AMS is proposing to lower the recommended drained weight for