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Processed Fruit and Vegetable Grading Services

RECORDS

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Grading Services Processed Fruits and Vegetables

If you are a processor, buyer, or seller of canned, frozen, dried, or dehydrated fruits and vegetables, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has a grading service to meet your needs.

Grading of processed fruits and vegetables and such related products as jams, jellies, and peanut butter is provided on request and for a fee.

Grading is based on official U.S. grade standards, but you may also have products checked by graders on your own quality or condition specifications.

This impartial, third-party certification of quality can help sellers market their products, assure buyers that shipments meet their contract specifications, and aid processors in quality control. USDA certification of quality and condition can also help settle claims for damage incurred in transit or storage. And USDA can help volume feeders write purchase specifications, as well as certify that purchases meet contract terms.

Green beans are checked for uniformity of size.



Anyone who has a financial interest in a product may request the grading service. Bankers, for example, can ask USDA to certify the quality, quantity, and condition of products posted as collateral in support of loans.

Grading service can be provided in the processing plant, at warehouses, or wherever you request it.

Processors who use in-plant grading services based on U.S. grade standards may identify their products with the USDA grade.

U.S. Grade Standards

Specialists in USDA have developed U.S. grade standards for some 150 processed fruit and vegetable products.

These U.S. grade standards are the yardsticks used by USDA's graders when you request official grading based on the U.S. grades. The standards also provide industry with a common trading

language, a guide for in-plant quality control, and a convenient basis for sales.

USDA grade standards for most processed fruits and vegetables describe three quality levels:

- **U.S. Grade A** means excellent color and flavor, uniformity of size and shape, tenderness, and few defects—for use when appearance is most important.
- **U.S. Grade B** means good quality—suitable for most purposes.
- **U.S. Grade C** means a thrifty buy when optimum appearance and texture are not too important.

Only products that have been officially graded and packed in plants approved by USDA may be labeled with the U.S. grade.

USDA's voluntary grade standards complement mandatory Federal standards designed for consumer protection. For example, the Food and Drug Administration has established minimum standards

of quality for a number of fruit and vegetable products. Products that do not meet these minimum standards must carry wording on the label stating that fact.

USDA adopts, as the minimum grade level, specifications that are at least as high as FDA's mandatory requirements. This minimum grade is Grade C when the U.S. grade standards for a product provide three levels of quality and usually Grade B in those standards where only two levels of quality are provided.

USDA also has developed standards for condition of food containers. These standards are used primarily by State and

Federal agencies in their food purchase programs. However, large volume food buyers may also request that USDA graders use these standards to certify the condition of the containers of the food they are purchasing.

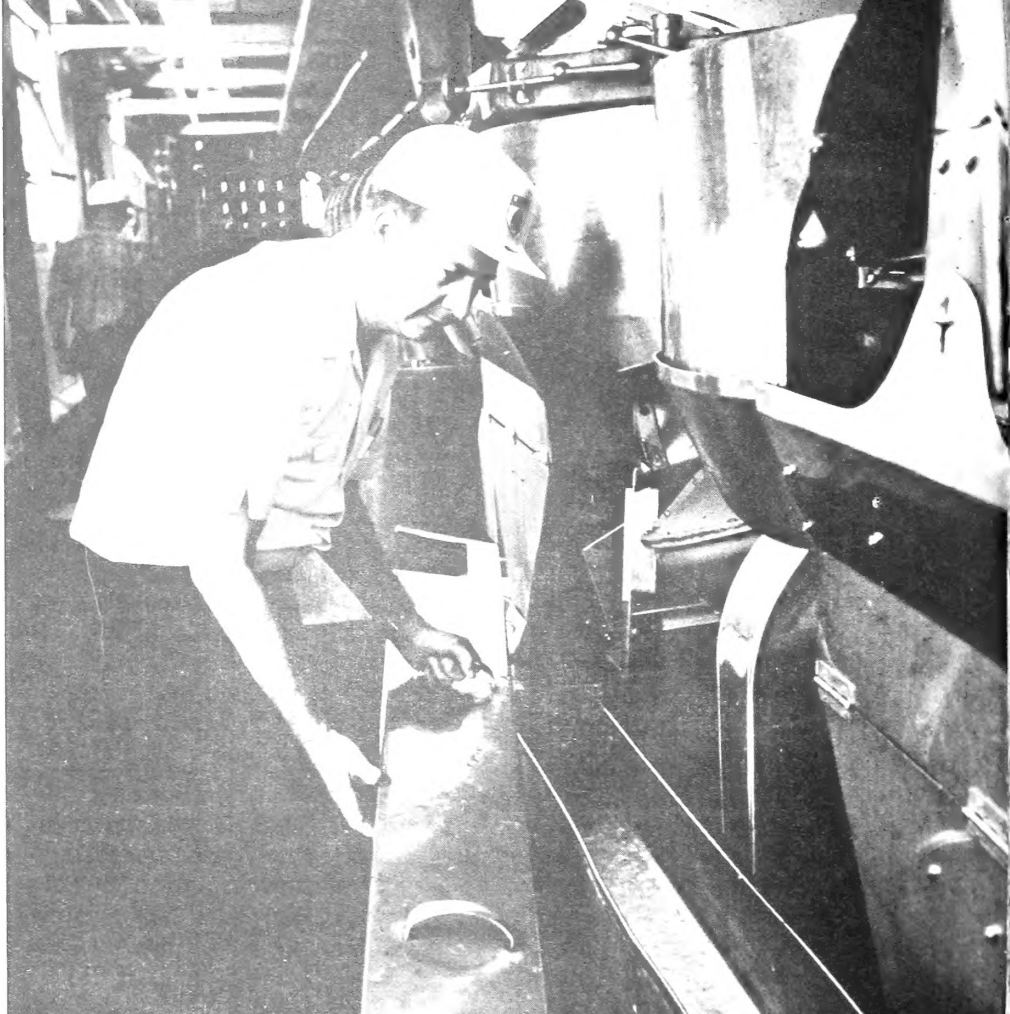
Single copies of USDA's grade standards and standards for condition of containers are available, on request, from the Washington, D.C., office of the grading service.

Plant Survey

Before USDA begins in-plant grading services, a plant survey is required. USDA also requires a plant survey if a processor wishes to use a U.S. grade designation on the label of products graded on a lot basis.

In addition to the initial plant approval, surveys must be repeated at least annually if the processor wishes to continue USDA grading or official grade labeling.

USDA's plant survey insures adherence to sanitation guidelines.



The plant survey is based on the Food and Drug Administration's good manufacturing practices sanitation guidelines and regulations issued under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. When a plant passes a survey, processors—and their customers—can be assured that it meets rigid sanitary requirements for facilities, equipment, and operating methods.

The grader making the plant survey reports the results, in writing, to a designated plant official. When the plant meets the required sanitary and other standards, in-plant grading services may begin.

Continuous Inspection

For continuous in-plant grading services, one or more USDA graders is assigned to a processing plant at all times it is operating to make continuous in-process checks on preparation, processing, and packing operations.

The grader observes the preparation of raw materials and the plant conditions

under which the product is being prepared, processed, and packed. The grader makes frequent line checks of the quality of the product as it is processed and examines samples of the finished product to determine whether it meets U.S. grade standards or other specifications.

The grader gives the processor daily reports on the grade of the product being packed as well as plant sanitation conditions. On the basis of these reports, the processor can take immediate action to correct problems before they become

serious and impair the quality level of the pack.

After the grader finishes the examinations and detailed analyses, he or she issues certificates or other official reports showing the results.

Products packed in any plant operated under the continuous inspection program may be labeled with the official USDA grade marks. The label may carry the familiar shield with the statement "Packed under continuous inspection of the U.S. Department of Agriculture," the official grade, such as "U.S. Grade A,"



or both. The packer may also refer to continuous inspection in his advertising and sales programs.

Pack Certification

This type of grading service is similar to continuous inspection except that graders need not be present continuously during all operating shifts of the plant. While they are on duty, however, the graders may perform the same functions as they would under continuous inspection. Their responsibilities vary, depending on the needs of the processor. They may certify the entire production through a coopera-

tive quality assurance program. (This program is available to packers who have a quality control program meeting USDA requirements.) Or, if the packer prefers, the graders may certify only designated production lots.

Processors may use this in-plant inspection service—like continuous inspection—as part of their quality control programs as well as to facilitate sales.

Products graded under this service can carry the official grade names within the official shield but no reference to continuous inspection may be used.



Lot Inspection

Anyone with a financial interest can request grading of specific lots of processed fruits or vegetables. The lots can be of any size and located in processing plants, warehouses, or cold storage plants—in producing areas, in transit, or terminal markets.

The graders will check the condition of the containers, draw a prescribed number of sample containers from the lot, and examine the contents to determine the quality and condition of the product. The results of the grading are reported on an official certificate. Official grade names—but not the shield—may be used on products that have been graded and certified on a lot basis if the plant in which the products were processed was approved in a plant survey.

Unofficial Sample Inspection

Under this program, processors can select their own samples and submit them to the nearest grading office for examination.



This type of grading is most helpful as an aid to a plant's quality control program. However, it is not recommended for negotiating sales because the certificate shows only the grade of the submitted sample—no reference is made to the lot from which the sample was drawn.

No official grade names may be used on products graded under this program.

Service for Volume Food Buyers

In addition to providing quality, quantity, and condition certification, USDA will also help volume buyers translate their needs into exact purchase specifications. The specifications can be based on official USDA grade standards as well as a buyer's own specific requirements. Buyers can use these specifications for letting contracts and calling for bids from suppliers. In the contract with suppliers, buyers can specify that all purchases must be certified by USDA.

Under the lot inspection program, USDA graders check samples to determine the quality and condition of a product.



The Graders And Their Laboratories

The average USDA grader is a college graduate. Upon entering the grading force, he or she goes through a formal 1-year training program getting a thorough knowledge of grading techniques through classroom theory work and practical on-the-job training under an experienced supervisor. Before new graders are authorized to officially grade and certify a specific product, they are given additional training in the techniques for grading that product.

The trained grader is backed up by well-equipped laboratory facilities. Each grading office is equipped with the latest scientific equipment needed for analyzing the commodities inspected in the area.

Quality Control Aids

USDA has developed a number of visual aids, color standards, and guides for

Laboratory analysis of a product is an important part of the official grading process.

uniform interpretation of the various quality factors in the U.S. grade standards. While these were designed primarily for use by the grading service, many of them are also available to you as an industry member. Processors, particularly, find these visual aids and color guides valuable tools in maintaining quality control during their processing operations.

Among the types of visual aids used by the grading force are wax models depicting shapes, colors, and defects; special plastic and glass color comparators; photographic color slides and prints; and black and white photographs and drawings. USDA has granted licenses to qualified firms to manufacture and sell some of these visual aids. You can get details on available aids and the firms who manufacture them from the grading office nearest you.

USDA has also developed two standards for statistical procedures. One standard covers inspection by variables (those characteristics that can be measured

against a specified requirement). This standard contains certain basic information such as definitions of statistical terms and symbols, the recording of data, and the principles of acceptance and rejection.

The other standard supplements the first and is of an instructional nature. It supplies specifics for the determination of the amount of fruit or vegetable ingredients filled into a container at the time of processing.

Together, these standards represent a part of USDA's efforts to use new concepts for product control in its standardization and grading programs. They are also available for use by processors. You can get details on these standards and find out how they can fit into your quality control program by contacting the Washington, D.C., office of the grading service.

How To Obtain Official Grading

For further information regarding grading services, contact the Officer-in-Charge, Processed Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Quality Division, Food Safety and Quality Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, at the field office nearest you.

Arkansas

P.O. Box 970
Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701
(501) 521-1438

California

1130 "O" St., Rm. 3408
Fresno, California 93721
(209) 487-5210

300 N. Los Angeles St., Rm. 1309
Los Angeles, California 90012
(213) 688-3173

1438 S. First St.
San Jose, California 95110
(408) 275-7468

5635 Stratford Circle, Suite 11
Stockton, California 95207
(209) 946-6281

Colorado

357 U.S. Custom House
Denver, Colorado 80202
(303) 837-3160

Florida

P.O. Box 860
Winter Haven, Florida 33880
(813) 294-7416

Georgia

1555 St. Joseph Ave.
East Point, Georgia 30344
(404) 763-7495

Hawaii

P.O. Box 22159
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822
(808) 941-3071

Illinois

U.S. Custom House, Rm. 1014
610 S. Canal St.
Chicago, Illinois 60607
(312) 353-6215

Maine

165 Lancaster St.
Portland, Maine 04101
(207) 780-3243

Maryland

57 West Timonium Rd.
Timonium, Maryland 21093
(301) 252-2280

102 Maryland Ave.
Easton, Maryland 21601
(301) 822-3383

Michigan

Rm. 2-1-58, Federal Center
75 N. Washington Ave.
Battle Creek, Michigan 49017
(616) 962-6511, ext. 6348

New York

201 Varick St., Rm. 1011
New York, New York 10014
(212) 620-3521

900 Jefferson Rd.
Rochester, New York 14623
(716) 244-2266

Ohio

P.O. Box 512
Van Wert, Ohio 45891
(419) 238-4105

Oregon

P.O. Box 5345
Salem, Oregon 97304
(503) 399-5761

Puerto Rico

P.O. Box 9112
Santurce, Puerto Rico 00908
(809) 783-4116

Texas

P.O. Box 1123
Weslaco, Texas 78596
(512) 968-2772

Utah

Laboratory Bldg.
State Capitol
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114
(801) 533-4133

Virginia

No. 1 N. Fourteenth St., Rm. 332
Richmond, Virginia 23219
(804) 786-2422

Washington

5507-6th Ave. So.
Seattle, Washington 98108
(206) 764-3423

32 North 3rd. St., Rm. 212
Yakima, Washington 98901
(509) 575-5869

Wisconsin

P.O. Box 96
Ripon, Wisconsin 54971
(414) 748-2287

Single copies of U.S. grade standards for processed fruit and vegetable products and standards for condition of containers are available from: Processed Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Quality Division, Food Safety and Quality Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250 (202) 447-4693

All FSQS services are available without regard to race, color, creed, sex, or national origin. If you know of any violations of this principle, send details to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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