

regulations from 2^{27/32} inches to 2^{29/32} inches, and will allow handlers the option of packing slightly larger tomatoes in a 6x6 container. With this increased flexibility, handlers will be able to better meet consumer demand for larger tomatoes, while providing greater returns to growers. The Committee unanimously recommended this change. Authority for this action is provided in § 966.52.

If handlers take advantage of the increased packing flexibility, they would incur direct costs associated with the purchase of new sizing belts. Sizing belts convey and size fruit during the packing process. Depending on the amount of use, sizing belts can last a season or may need to be replaced two to three times a season. Estimated prices associated with these purchases could range from \$450.00 for a small handler to \$19,000 for very large handlers. While there are short-term costs associated with the maximum diameter of the 6x6 sizing designation, the benefits are expected to outweigh the costs. Moreover, changing sizing belts is a routine action since they have to be regularly replaced depending on use. These costs are expected to be minimal relative to the benefits expected, and in relation to normal operating costs and procedures.

A study conducted by Dr. John J. VanSickle at the University of Florida estimates that a shift of 1 percent of 5x6 tomatoes into the smaller size categories would increase the prices for 5x6-size tomatoes by .25 percent. For 6x6's, the price could increase by .15 percent. The increase in price would occur in response to consumer demand for packs with slightly larger tomatoes.

This change is designed to provide handlers with more flexibility as to how sizes are packed. Because of this, handlers can choose to continue to pack as they have without making any adjustments due to this rule change. Purchasing new equipment is not necessary to remain in compliance with order provisions. Therefore, this rule places the decision with the individual handler as to whether the costs are outweighed by the benefits.

Individual seasons and different periods during the same season can present a fair amount of variability in production and size. This change provides handlers with some additional flexibility when packing for size to allow handlers to make some adjustments in order to maximize returns and to service customer demand. This rule provides the opportunity for handlers to make adjustments based on market

conditions. This should have a positive effect on returns.

The Committee recommended these changes to improve the marketing of Florida tomatoes. The opportunities and benefits of this rule are expected to be equally available to all tomato handlers and growers regardless of their size of operation. This action will have a beneficial impact on producers and handlers since it will allow tomato handlers more flexibility in making tomatoes available to meet consumer needs consistent with crop and market conditions.

The Committee discussed alternatives to this recommendation, including leaving the regulations as currently issued. All Committee members agreed that this change would be helpful in improving pack appearance and in providing handlers some additional flexibility. Therefore, the Committee voted to make this change rather than leave the size designation for 6X6 unchanged.

This rule will not impose any additional reporting or recordkeeping requirements on either small or large tomato handlers. 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.

In addition, as noted in the initial regulatory flexibility analysis, the Department has not identified any relevant Federal rules that duplicate, overlap or conflict with this rule.

Further, the Committee's meeting was widely publicized throughout the tomato industry and all interested persons were invited to attend the meeting and participate in Committee deliberations. Like all Committee meetings, the September 8, 2000, meeting was a public meeting and all entities, both large and small, were able to express their views on this issue.

Also, the Committee has a number of appointed subcommittees to review certain issues and make recommendations to the Committee. The Committee's Marketing Subcommittee met on August 21, 2000, and discussed this issue in detail. That meeting was also a public meeting and both large and small entities were able to participate and express their views.

An interim final rule concerning this action was published in the **Federal Register** on November 6, 2000. Copies of the rule were mailed by the Committee's staff to all Committee members and tomato handlers. In addition, the Office of the Federal Register made the rule available through the Internet. That rule provided for a 60-day comment period,

which ended January 5, 2001. No comments were received.

A small business guide on complying with fruit, vegetable, and specialty crop marketing agreements and orders may be viewed at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>. Any questions about the compliance guide should be sent to Jay Guerber at the previously mentioned address in the **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section.

After consideration of all relevant material presented, including the Committee's recommendation, and other information, it is found that finalizing the interim final rule, without change, as published in the **Federal Register** (65 FR 66492, November 6, 2000) will tend to effectuate the declared policy of the Act.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 966

Marketing agreements, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Tomatoes.

PART 966—TOMATOES GROWN IN FLORIDA

Accordingly, the interim final rule amending 7 CFR part 966 which was published at 65 FR 66492 on November 6, 2000, is adopted as a final rule without change.

Dated: February 28, 2001.

Kenneth C. Clayton,

Acting Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service.

[FR Doc. 01-5317 Filed 3-5-01; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 982

[Docket No. FV01-982-1 IFR]

Hazelnuts Grown in Oregon and Washington; Establishment of Interim and Final Free and Restricted Percentages for the 2000-2001 Marketing Year

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Interim final rule with request for comments.

SUMMARY: This rule establishes interim and final free and restricted percentages for domestic inshell hazelnuts for the 2000-2001 marketing year under the Federal marketing order for hazelnuts grown in Oregon and Washington. The percentages allocate the quantity of domestically produced hazelnuts which may be marketed in the domestic inshell market. The percentages are intended to

stabilize the supply of domestic inshell hazelnuts to meet the limited domestic demand for such hazelnuts and provide reasonable returns to producers. This rule was recommended unanimously by the Hazelnut Marketing Board (Board), which is the agency responsible for local administration of the marketing order.

DATES: *Effective Date:* This interim final rule is effective March 7, 2001 through June 30, 2001.

Applicability Date: This interim final rule applies during the period July 1, 2000, through June 30, 2001. Comments received by May 7, 2001 will be considered prior to issuance of a final rule.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit written comments concerning this rule. 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 available for public inspection in the Office of the Docket Clerk during regular business hours, or can viewed at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Teresa L. Hutchinson, Northwest Marketing Field Office, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, 1220 SW Third Avenue, suite 385, Portland, OR 97204; telephone: (503) 326-2724, Fax: (503) 326-7440; or George J. 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 by contacting Jay Guerber, 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, or E-mail: Jay.Guerber@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This rule is issued under Marketing Agreement No. 115 and Marketing Order No. 982, both as amended (7 CFR part 982), regulating the handling of hazelnuts grown in Oregon and Washington, hereinafter referred to as the "order." The 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. It is intended that this action apply to all merchantable hazelnuts handled during the 2000-2001 marketing year (July 1, 2000, through June 30, 2001). 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 rule establishes marketing percentages which allocate the quantity of inshell hazelnuts that may be marketed in domestic markets. The Board is required to meet prior to September 20 of each marketing year to compute its marketing policy for that year, and compute and announce an inshell trade demand if it determines that volume regulations would tend to effectuate the declared policy of the Act. The Board also computes and announces preliminary free and restricted percentages for that year.

The inshell trade demand is the amount of inshell hazelnuts that handlers may ship to the domestic market throughout the marketing season. The order specifies that the inshell trade demand be computed by averaging the preceding three "normal" years' trade acquisitions of inshell hazelnuts, rounded to the nearest whole number. The Board may increase the three-year average by up to 25 percent, if market conditions warrant an increase. The Board's authority to recommend volume regulations and the computations used to determine the

percentages are specified in § 982.40 of the order.

The quantity to be marketed is broken down into free and restricted percentages to make available hazelnuts which may be marketed in domestic inshell markets (free) and hazelnuts which must be exported, shelled or otherwise disposed of by handlers (restricted). Prior to September 20 of each marketing year, the Board must compute and announce preliminary free and restricted percentages. The preliminary free percentage releases 80 percent of the inshell trade demand to the domestic market. The purpose of releasing only 80 percent of the inshell trade demand under the preliminary percentage is to guard against an underestimate of crop size. The preliminary free percentage is expressed as a percentage of the total supply subject to regulation (supply) and is based on the preliminary crop estimate.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) has estimated hazelnut production at 25,000 tons for the Oregon and Washington area. The majority of domestic inshell hazelnuts are marketed in October, November, and December. By November, the marketing season is well under way.

The Board initially adjusted the crop estimate down to 24,153 tons by taking into consideration the average crop disappearance over the preceding three years (8.32 percent) and the undeclared carry-in (1,234 tons.) The Board computed the adjusted inshell trade demand of 3,163 tons by taking the difference between the average of the past three years' sales (4,347 tons) and the declared carry-in from last year's crop (1,184 tons.)

The Board computed and announced preliminary free and restricted percentages of 10 percent and 90 percent, respectively, at its August 31, 2000, meeting. The Board computed the preliminary free percentage by multiplying the adjusted trade demand by 80 percent and dividing the result by the adjusted crop estimate (3,163 tons \times 80 percent/24,153 tons = 10 percent.) The preliminary free percentage thus initially released 2,530 tons of hazelnuts from the 2000 supply for domestic inshell use, and the restricted percentage withheld 21,738 tons for the export and kernel market.

Under the order, the Board must meet again on or before November 15 to recommend interim final and final percentages. The Board uses current crop estimates to calculate interim final and final percentages. The interim final percentages are calculated in the same way as the preliminary percentages and release the remaining 20 percent (to

total 100 percent of the inshell trade demand) previously computed by the Board. Final free and restricted percentages may release up to an additional 15 percent of the average of the preceding three years' trade acquisitions to provide an adequate carryover into the following season (*i.e.*, desirable carryout). The order requires that the final free and restricted percentages shall be effective 30 days prior to the end of the marketing year, or earlier, if recommended by the Board and approved by the Secretary.

Revisions in the marketing policy can be made until February 15 of each marketing year, but the inshell trade demand can only be revised upward, consistent with § 982.40(e).

The Board met on November 14, 2000, and reviewed and approved an amended marketing policy and recommended the establishment of interim final and final free and restricted percentages. The interim final free and restricted percentages were recommended at 14 percent free and 86 percent restricted. Final percentages,

which included an additional 15 percent of the average of the preceding three-years' trade acquisitions for desirable carry-out, were recommended at 17 percent free and 83 percent restricted effective May 1, 2001. The final free percentage releases 3,815 tons of inshell hazelnuts from the 2000 supply for domestic use.

The final marketing percentages are based on the Board's final production estimate and the following supply and demand information for the 2000–2001 marketing year:

		Tons
Inshell Supply:		
(1) Total production (Board's estimate)		23,000
(2) Less substandard, farm use (disappearance)		1,914
(3) Merchantable production (Board's adjusted crop estimate; Item 1 minus Item 2)		21,086
(4) Plus undeclared carry-in as of July 1, 2000, subject to regulation		1,233
(5) Supply subject to regulation (Item 3 plus Item 4)		22,319
Inshell Trade Demand:		
(6) Average trade acquisitions of inshell hazelnuts for three prior years		4,347
(7) Less declared carry-in as of July 1, 2000, not subject to regulation		1,184
(8) Adjusted Inshell Trade Demand (Item 6 minus Item 7)		3,163
(9) Desirable carry-out on August 31, 2001 (15 percent of Item 6)		652
(10) Adjusted Inshell Trade Demand plus desirable carry-out (Item 8 plus Item 9)		3,815
Percentages		
	Free	Restricted
(11) Interim final percentages (Item 8 divided by Item 5) × 100	14	86
(12) Final percentages (Item 10 divided by Item 5) × 100	17	83

In addition to complying with the provisions of the order, the Board also considered the Department's 1982 "Guidelines for Fruit, Vegetable, and Specialty Crop Marketing Orders" (Guidelines) when making its computations in the marketing policy. This volume control regulation provides a method to collectively limit the supply of inshell hazelnuts available for sale in domestic markets. The Guidelines provide that the domestic inshell market has available a quantity equal to 110 percent of prior years' shipments before secondary market allocations are approved. This provides for plentiful supplies for consumers and for market expansion, while retaining the mechanism for dealing with oversupply situations. The established final percentages are based on the final inshell trade demand, and will make available an additional 652 tons for desirable carry-out effective May 1, 2001. The total free supply for the 2000–2001 marketing year is 4,999 tons of hazelnuts, which is the sum of the final trade demand of 4,347 tons and the 652 ton desirable carry-out. This amount is 115 percent of prior years' sales and exceeds the goal of the Guidelines.

Pursuant to requirements set forth in the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS)

has considered the economic impact of this rule on small entities. Accordingly, the 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 the 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 800 producers of hazelnuts in the production area and approximately 22 handlers subject to regulation under the order. Small agricultural producers have been defined by the Small Business Administration (13 CFR 121.201) as those having annual receipts of less than \$500,000, and small agricultural service firms are defined as those whose annual receipts are less than \$5,000,000. Using these criteria, virtually all of the producers are small agricultural producers and an estimated 19 of the 22 handlers are small agricultural service firms. In view of the foregoing, it can be concluded that the majority of hazelnut

producers and handlers may be classified as small entities.

Board meetings are widely publicized in advance of the meetings and are held in a location central to the production area. The meetings are open to all industry members and other interested persons who are encouraged to participate in the deliberations and voice their opinions on topics under discussion. Thus, Board recommendations can be considered to represent the interests of small business entities in the industry.

Many years of marketing experience led to the development of the current volume control procedures. These procedures have helped the industry solve its marketing problems by keeping inshell supplies in balance with domestic needs. The current volume control procedures fully supply the domestic inshell market while preventing oversupplies in that market.

Inshell hazelnuts sold to the domestic market provide higher returns to the industry than are obtained from shelling. The inshell market is inelastic and is characterized as having limited demand and being prone to oversupply.

Industry statistics show that total hazelnut production has varied widely over the last 10 years, from a low of 15,500 tons in 1998 to a high of 47,000

tons in 1997. Average production has been around 29,800 tons. While crop size has fluctuated, the volume regulations contribute toward orderly marketing and market stability, and help moderate the variation in returns for all producers and handlers, both large and small. For instance, production in the shortest crop year (1998) was 55 percent of the 10-year average (1990–1999). Production in the biggest crop year (1997) was 158 percent of the 10-year average. The percentage releases provide all handlers with the opportunity to benefit from the most profitable domestic inshell market. That market is available to all handlers, regardless of handler size.

As an alternative, the Board discussed not regulating the 2000–2001 hazelnut crop. However, without any regulations in effect, the Board believes that the industry would oversupply the inshell domestic market.

While the level of benefits of this rulemaking is difficult to quantify, the stabilizing effects of the volume regulations impact both small and large handlers positively by helping them maintain and expand markets even though hazelnut supplies fluctuate widely from season to season.

Hazelnuts produced under the order comprise virtually all of the hazelnuts produced in the United States. This production represents, on average, less than 5 percent of total U.S. tree nut production, and less than 5 percent of the world's hazelnut production.

This volume control regulation provides a method for the U.S. hazelnut industry to limit the supply of domestic inshell hazelnuts available for sale in the United States. Section 982.40 of the order establishes a procedure and computations for the Board to follow in recommending to the Secretary release of preliminary, interim final, and final quantities of hazelnuts to be released to the free and restricted markets each marketing year. The program results in plentiful supplies for consumers and for market expansion while retaining the mechanism for dealing with oversupply situations.

Currently, U.S. hazelnut production can be successfully allocated between the inshell domestic and secondary markets. One of the best secondary markets for hazelnuts is the export market. Inshell hazelnuts produced under the marketing order compete well in export markets because of quality. Europe, and Germany in particular, is historically the primary world market for U.S. produced inshell hazelnuts. A third market is for shelled hazelnuts (kernels) sold domestically. Domestically produced kernels

generally command a higher price in the domestic market than imported kernels. The industry is continuing its efforts to develop and expand secondary markets, especially the domestic kernel market. Small business entities, both producers and handlers, benefit from the expansion efforts resulting from this program.

There are some reporting, recordkeeping, and other compliance requirements under the order. The reporting and recordkeeping burdens are necessary for compliance purposes and for developing statistical data for maintenance of the program. The information collection requirements have been previously approved by the Office of Management and Budget under OMB No. 0581–0178. The forms require information which is readily available from handler records and which can be provided without data processing equipment or trained statistical staff. As with other marketing order programs, reports and forms are periodically reviewed to reduce or eliminate duplicate information collection burdens by industry and public sector agencies. This interim final rule does not change those requirements. In addition, the Department has not identified any relevant Federal rules that duplicate, overlap or conflict with this regulation.

Further, the Board's meeting was widely publicized throughout the hazelnut industry and all interested persons were invited to attend the meeting and participate in Board deliberations. Like all Board meetings, the November 14, 2000, meeting was a public meeting and all entities, both large and small, were able to express their views on this issue. Finally, interested persons are invited to submit information on the regulatory and informational impacts of this action on small businesses.

A small business guide on complying with fruit, vegetable, and specialty crop marketing agreements and orders may be viewed at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>. Any questions about the compliance guide should be sent to Jay Guerber at the previously mentioned address in the **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section.

This rule invites comments on the establishment of interim and final free and restricted percentages for the 2000–2001 marketing year under the hazelnut order. Any comments received will be considered prior to finalization of this rule.

After consideration of all relevant material presented, including the Board's recommendation, and other information, it is found that this interim

final rule, as hereinafter set forth, will tend to effectuate the declared policy of the Act.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553, it is also found and determined, upon good cause, that it is impracticable, unnecessary, and contrary to the public interest to give preliminary notice prior to putting this rule into effect, and that good cause exists for not postponing the effective date of this action until 30 days after publication in the **Federal Register** because: (1) The 2000–2001 marketing year began July 1, 2000, and the percentages established herein apply to all merchantable hazelnuts handled from the beginning of the crop year; (2) handlers are aware of this rule, which was recommended at an open Board meeting, and need no additional time to comply with this rule; and (3) interested persons are provided a 60-day comment period in which to respond, and all comments timely received will be considered prior to finalization of this action.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 982

Filberts, Hazelnuts, Marketing agreements, Nuts, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, 7 CFR Part 982 is amended as follows:

PART 982—HAZELNUTS GROWN IN OREGON AND WASHINGTON

1. The authority citation for 7 CFR Part 982 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 601–674.

2. Section 982.248 is added to read as follows:

Note: This section will not be published in the annual Code of Federal Regulations.

§ 982.248 Free and restricted percentages—2000–2001 marketing year.

(a) The interim final free and restricted percentages for merchantable hazelnuts for the 2000–2001 marketing year shall be 14 and 86 percent, respectively.

(b) On May 1, 2001, the final free and restricted percentages for merchantable hazelnuts for the 2000–2001 marketing year shall be 17 and 83 percent, respectively.

Dated: February 28, 2001.

Kenneth C. Clayton,

Acting Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service.

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