

section, any lot of Rainier cherries or other varieties of "lightly colored sweet cherries" unless such cherries meet a minimum of 17 percent soluble solids as determined from a composite sample by refractometer prior to packing, at time of packing, or at time of shipment: *Provided*, That individual lots shall not be combined with other lots to meet soluble solids requirements.

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Dated: February 4, 2005.

Kenneth C. Clayton,

Acting Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service.

[FR Doc. 05-2545 Filed 2-9-05; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 984

[Docket No. FV04-984-2 FIR]

Walnuts Grown in California; Decreased Assessment Rate

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Department of Agriculture (USDA) is adopting, as a final rule, an interim final rule which decreased the assessment rate established for the Walnut Marketing Board (Board) for the 2004-05 and subsequent marketing years from \$0.0101 to \$0.0094 per kernelweight pound of assessable walnuts. The Board locally administers the marketing order (order) which regulates the handling of walnuts grown in California. Authorization to assess walnut handlers enables the Board to incur expenses that are reasonable and necessary to administer the program. The marketing year began August 1 and ends July 31. The assessment rate will remain in effect indefinitely unless modified, suspended, or terminated.

EFFECTIVE DATE: March 14, 2005.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Toni Sasselli, Program Analyst, or Kurt J. Kimmel, Regional Manager, California Marketing Field Office, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, 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, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Stop 0237, Washington, DC 20250-0237;

Telephone: (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-8938.

Small businesses may request information on complying with this regulation by contacting Jay Guerber, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, 1400 Independence Avenue SW., Stop 0237, Washington DC 20250-0237; Telephone: (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-8938, or E-mail: Jay.Guerber@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This rule is issued under Marketing Agreement and Order No. 984, both as amended (7 CFR part 984), regulating the handling of walnuts grown in California, hereinafter referred to as the "order." The marketing agreement and order are effective under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, as amended (7 U.S.C. 601-674), hereinafter referred to as the "Act."

USDA is issuing this rule in conformance with Executive Order 12866.

This rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. Under the marketing order now in effect, California walnut handlers are subject to assessments. Funds to administer the order are derived from such assessments. It is intended that the assessment rate as issued herein will be applicable to all assessable walnuts beginning on August 1, 2004, and continue until amended, suspended, or terminated. 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 USDA 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. Such handler is afforded the opportunity for a hearing on the petition. After the hearing USDA 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 USDA'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 continues in effect the action that decreased the assessment rate established for the Board for the 2004-05 and subsequent marketing

years from \$0.0101 to \$0.0094 per kernelweight pound of assessable walnuts.

The order provides authority for the Board, with the approval of the USDA, to formulate an annual budget of expenses and collect assessments from handlers to administer the program. The members of the Board are producers and handlers of California walnuts. They are familiar with the Board's needs and with the costs for goods and services in their local area and are thus in a position to formulate an appropriate budget and assessment rate. The assessment rate is formulated and discussed in a public meeting. Thus, all directly affected persons have an opportunity to participate and provide input.

For the 2003-04 and subsequent marketing years, the Board recommended, and USDA approved, an assessment rate of \$0.0101 per kernelweight pound of assessable walnuts that would continue in effect from year to year unless modified, suspended, or terminated by USDA upon recommendation and information submitted by the Board or other information available to USDA.

The Board met on September 10, 2004, and unanimously recommended 2004-05 expenditures of \$2,749,500 and an assessment rate of \$0.0094 per kernelweight pound of assessable walnuts. In comparison, last year's budgeted expenditures were \$2,863,350. The assessment rate of \$0.0094 is \$0.0007 lower than the \$0.0101 rate previously in effect. The lower assessment rate is necessary because this year's crop is estimated by the California Agricultural Statistics Service (CASS) to be 325,000 tons (292,500,000 kernelweight pounds merchantable), and the budget is about 4 percent less than last year's budget. Sufficient income should be generated at the lower rate for the Board to meet its anticipated expenses.

Major categories in the budget recommended by the Board for 2004-05 include \$2,037,500 for research and marketing programs (\$1,393,500 for market research and development, \$550,000 for production research, and \$94,000 to the California Agricultural Statistics Service for a crop estimate), \$332,000 for employee expenses (administrative and office salaries, payroll taxes, workers compensation, and other employee benefits), \$97,000 for office expenses (rent, office supplies, telephone, fax, postage, printing, equipment maintenance, and furniture), \$96,000 for other operating expenses (management travel, field travel, insurance, and financial audits), \$5,000

for controlled (compliance check) purchases, \$75,000 for a production research director, and \$107,000 as a reserve for contingency. Budgeted expenses for these items in 2003–04 were \$2,438,000, \$334,625, \$83,000, \$82,000, \$5,000, \$73,000, and \$15,725, respectively.

The assessment rate recommended by the Board was derived by dividing anticipated expenses by expected shipments of California walnuts certified as merchantable. Merchantable shipments for the year are estimated at 292,500,000 kernelweight pounds which should provide \$2,749,500 in assessment income and allow the Board to cover its expenses. Unexpended funds may be used temporarily to defray expenses of the subsequent marketing year, but must be made available to the handlers from whom collected within 5 months after the end of the year according to § 984.69.

The assessment rate established in this rule will continue in effect indefinitely unless modified, suspended, or terminated by USDA upon recommendation and other information submitted by the Board or other available information.

Although this assessment rate is effective for an indefinite period, the Board will continue to meet prior to or during each marketing year to recommend a budget of expenses and consider recommendations for modification of the assessment rate. The dates and times of Board meetings are available from the Board or USDA. Board meetings are open to the public and interested persons may express their views at these meetings. USDA will evaluate Board recommendations and other available information to determine whether modification of the assessment rate is needed. Further rulemaking will be undertaken as necessary. The Board's 2004–05 budget and those for subsequent marketing years will be reviewed and, as appropriate, approved by USDA.

Final 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 rule on small entities. Accordingly, AMS has prepared this final 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 5,800 producers of walnuts in the production area and about 43 handlers subject to regulation under the order. Small agricultural producers are defined by the Small Business Administration (13 CFR 121.201) as those having annual receipts of less than \$750,000, and small agricultural service firms are defined as those having annual receipts of less than \$5,000,000.

Current industry information shows that 14 of the 43 handlers (32.5 percent) shipped over \$5,000,000 of merchantable walnuts and could be considered large handlers by the Small Business Administration. Twenty-nine of the 43 walnut handlers (67.5 percent) shipped under \$5,000,000 of merchantable walnuts and could be considered small handlers. An estimated 58 walnut producers, or about 1 percent of the 5,800 total producers, would be considered large producers with annual incomes over \$750,000. Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that the majority of California walnut handlers and producers may be classified as small entities.

This rule continues in effect the action that decreased the assessment rate established for the Board and collected from handlers for the 2004–05 and subsequent marketing years from \$0.0101 to \$0.0094 per kernelweight pound of assessable walnuts. The Board unanimously recommended 2004–05 expenditures of \$2,749,500. The decreased assessment rate should generate sufficient income to meet the Board's 2004–05 anticipated expenses. The lower assessment rate is primarily due to a lower budget and based on an estimated crop of 325,000 tons for the year (292,500,000 kernelweight pounds estimated merchantable).

Major categories in the budget recommended by the Board for 2004–05 include \$2,037,500 for research and marketing programs (\$1,393,500 for market research and development, \$550,000 for production research, and \$94,000 to the California Agricultural Statistics Service for a crop estimate), \$332,000 for employee expenses (administrative and office salaries, payroll taxes, workers compensation, and other employees benefits), \$97,000 for office expenses (rent, office supplies, telephone, fax, postage, printing, equipment maintenance, and furniture), \$96,000 for other operating expenses (management travel, field travel, Board expenses, insurance, and financial

audits), \$5,000 for controlled (compliance check) purchases, \$75,000 for a production research director, and \$107,000 as a reserve for contingency. Budgeted expenses for these items in 2003–04 were \$2,438,000, \$334,625, \$83,000, \$82,000, \$5,000, \$73,000, and \$15,725, respectively.

Prior to arriving at this budget, the Board considered information from various sources, such as the Board's Budget and Personnel Committee, Research Committee, and Marketing Development Committee. Alternative expenditure levels were discussed by these groups based upon the relative value of various research projects to the walnut industry. The recommended \$0.0094 per kernelweight pound assessment rate was then determined by dividing the total recommended budget by the 292,500,000 kernelweight pound estimate of assessable walnuts for the year. Unexpended funds may be used temporarily to defray expenses of the subsequent marketing year, but must be made available to the handlers from whom collected within 5 months after the end of the year according to § 984.69.

A review of historical information and preliminary information pertaining to the current marketing year indicates that the grower price for 2004–05 could range between \$0.50 and \$0.70 per kernelweight pound of assessable walnuts. Therefore, the estimated assessment revenue for the 2004–05 marketing year as a percentage of total grower revenue could range between 1.3 and 1.9 percent.

This action continues in effect the action that decreased the assessment obligation imposed on handlers. Assessments are applied uniformly on all handlers, and some of the costs may be passed on to producers. However, decreasing the assessment rate reduces the burden on handlers, and may reduce the burden on producers. In addition, the Board's meeting was widely publicized throughout the walnut industry and all interested persons were invited to attend the meeting and participate in Board deliberations on all issues. Like all Board meetings, the September 10, 2004, meeting was a public meeting and all entities, both large and small, were able to express views on this issue.

This action imposes no additional reporting or recordkeeping requirements on either small or large California walnut 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.

USDA has not identified any relevant Federal rules that duplicate, overlap, or conflict with this rule.

An interim final rule concerning this action was published in the **Federal Register** on October 29, 2004 (69 FR 63043). Copies of that rule were also mailed or sent via facsimile to all walnut handlers. Finally, the interim final rule was made available through the Internet by USDA and the Office of the Federal Register. A 60-day comment period was provided for interested persons to respond to the interim final rule. The comment period ended on December 28, 2004, and one comment was received.

The commenter believes that the Board and this marketing order program should be terminated in favor of a free market system. However, the Act authorizes this marketing order program. Further, this comment does not relate to the Board's assessment rate decrease. Thus, no changes are being made based on the comment submitted.

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/maob.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 information and recommendation submitted by the Board and other available information, it is hereby found that this rule, as hereinafter set forth, will tend to effectuate the declared policy of the Act.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 984

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

PART 984—WALNUTS GROWN IN CALIFORNIA

■ Accordingly, the interim final rule amending 7 CFR part 984 which was published at 69 FR 63043 on October 29, 2004, is adopted as a final rule without change.

Dated: February 7, 2005.

Kenneth C. Clayton,

Acting Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service.

[FR Doc. 05-2603 Filed 2-9-05; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410-02-P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 1260

[Docket No. LS-04-09]

Beef Promotion and Research; Reapportionment

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This final rule adjusts representation on the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board (Board), established under the Beef Promotion and Research Act of 1985 (Act), to reflect changes in cattle inventories and cattle and beef imports that have occurred since the most recent Board reapportionment rule became effective in 2002. These adjustments are required by the Beef Promotion and Research Order (Order) and will result in a decrease in Board membership from 108 to 104, effective with the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) appointments for terms beginning early in the year 2006.

EFFECTIVE DATE: February 10, 2005.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Kenneth R. Payne, Chief, Marketing Programs Branch, Room 2638-S, Livestock and Seed Program, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), USDA, STOP 0251, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250-0251; telephone number 202/720-1115; facsimile 202/720-1125, or by e-mail at: Kenenth.Payne@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Executive Order 12866

The Office of Management and Budget has waived the review process required by Executive Order 12866 for this action.

Executive Order 12988

This final rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. It is not intended to have retroactive effect.

Section 11 of the Act provides that nothing in the Act may be construed to preempt or supersede any other program relating to beef promotion organized and operated under the laws of the United States or any State. There are no administrative proceedings that must be exhausted prior to any judicial challenge to the provisions of this rule.

The Regulatory Flexibility Act and the Paperwork Reduction Act

Pursuant to the requirements set forth in the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA)

(5 United States Code (U.S.C.) 601 *et seq.*).

The Administrator of AMS has considered the economic effect of this action on small entities and has determined that this final rule will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities. The purpose of RFA is to fit regulatory actions to the scale of businesses subject to such actions in order that small businesses will not be unduly burdened.

In the January 30, 2004, issue of "Cattle," USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) estimates that in 2004 the number of cattle operations in the United States totaled about 1.1 million. The majority of these operations subject to the Order, 7 CFR 1260.101 *et seq.*, are considered small businesses under the criteria established by the Small Business Administration.

This final rule imposes no new burden on the industry. It only adjusts representation on the Board, established under the Act, to reflect changes in domestic cattle inventory and cattle and beef imports. The adjustments are required by the Order and will result in a decrease in Board membership from 108 to 104.

Background

The Board was initially appointed August 4, 1986, pursuant to the provisions of the Act (7 U.S.C. 2901 *et seq.*) and the Order issued thereunder. Domestic representation on the Board is based on cattle inventory numbers, and importer representation is based on the conversion of the volume of imported cattle, beef, or beef products into live animal equivalencies.

Section 1260.141(b) of the Order provides that the Board shall be composed of cattle producers and importers appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture from nominations submitted by certified producer and importer organizations. A producer may only be nominated to represent the unit in which that producer is a resident.

Section 1260.141(c) of the Order provides that at least every 3 years and not more than every 2 years, the Board shall review the geographic distribution of cattle inventories throughout the United States and the volume of imported cattle, beef, and beef products and, if warranted, shall reapportion units and/or modify the number of Board members from units in order to reflect the geographic distribution of cattle production volume in the United States and the volume of cattle, beef, or beef products imported into the United States.

Section 1260.141(d) of the Order authorizes the Board to recommend to