

**Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee
Holiday Inn Central, 1501 Rhode Island Avenue NW, Washington, D.C.**

FINAL MINUTES

These minutes summarize the June 4-5, 2007, meeting in Washington, D.C., of the Department of Agriculture (USDA)-chartered Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee). A number of presenters at the meeting used Microsoft PowerPoint slides to convey information; the slides are available for viewing at www.ams.usda.gov/fv.

Attendees:

Danny Arnold, A-W Produce Company; **Gordon Bowman**, Bowman Apple Products; **Wayne Brandt**, Brandt Farms; **Charles Ciruli**, Ciruli Brothers/Amex Distributing; **Jim Corby**, Food Lion; **Jeffrey Crist**, Crist Brothers Orchards; **Scott Danner**, Liberty Fruit Company; **Matthew D'Arrigo**, D'Arrigo Brothers of New York; **Helen Masser**, Sterman Masser; **Matt McInerney**, Western Growers Association; **Todd Michael**, Michael Farms; **John Millwater**, YUM! Brands; **Paul Palmby**, Seneca Foods; **David Patterson**, Patterson Farms; **Dan Richey**, Riverfront Groves/Riverfront Packing Company; **John Shelford**, Naturipe Farms; **Lisa Strube**, Strube Celery and Vegetable Company; **Michael Stuart**, Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association; **Tim York**, Markon Cooperative; **Robert Keeney** (Executive Secretary), USDA Agricultural Marketing Service; and **Andrew Hatch** (Designated Federal Official), USDA Agricultural Marketing Service

Absentees:

William Brim, Lewis Taylor Farms; **Steve Junqueiro**, Save Mart Supermarkets; **A.G. Kawamura**, California Department of Food and Agriculture; **Jan Kerns**, Kerns Rainbow Ranch; **Susan Matsushima**, Alluvion Inc.; and **Steffanie Smith**, Taylor Farms

Observers:

Linda Calvin, USDA Economic Research Service
Antoinette Carter, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Diane Coates, U.S. Apple Association
Jim Cranney, U.S. Apple Association
John Dyer, California Department of Food and Agriculture
Eric Forman, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Rufina Hertado, USDA Marketing and Regulatory Programs
Tom Karst, Vance Publishing/The Packer
Meryl Lubran, Institute of Food Technologists
Randle Macon, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Kathy Means, Produce Marketing Association
Tom O'Brien, Thelen Reid
Shannon Shepp, Florida Department of Food and Agriculture
Kim Siebecker, American Mushroom Institute
Martin Siwek, Texan A&M University/National Association of State Departments of Agriculture

Kathy Staley, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Jimmie Turner, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
Autumn Veazey, United Fresh Produce Association
Jessica Wasserman, Wasserman and Associates
Jennifer Weber, American Dietetic Association

This was the tenth meeting of the Advisory Committee since it received its first charter in 2001. The meeting took place at the Holiday Inn Central, 1501 Rhode Island Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. This was the final of three meetings since USDA re-chartered the Advisory Committee for two years in June 2005.

June 4, 2007 -- At 8:10 a.m., the Advisory Committee's Designated Federal Official Andrew Hatch reviewed administrative matters with Advisory Committee members. The Advisory Committee approved the minutes describing the January 2007 meeting without changes.

Department Greeting

Agricultural Marketing Service Administrator Lloyd Day and Department of Agriculture Under Secretary Bruce Knight welcomed Advisory Committee members. Mr. Knight, along with announcing that the group's charter has been renewed for two more years with new members, shared the Department's perspectives on the upcoming Farm Bill, immigration reform, planting restrictions and Agricultural Marketing Service audit programs.

Import Inspections and the Bio-Terrorism Act

The Customs and Border Protection's Jeff Grode addressed his agency's mission that includes preventing the introduction of harmful plant and animal pests and diseases from entering the United States. He described a host of activities being done to fulfill that work, including the National Agriculture Release Program, an initiative collaborated with the Department of Agriculture to facilitate the entry of low-risk products from certain countries at a lower inspection rate. Mr. Grode also highlighted a partnership with: (1) fellow Department of Homeland Security personnel to obtain good intelligence in an effort to detect and mitigate bio-terrorism threats; and (2) Food and Drug Administration personnel to enforce the Bio-Terrorism Act.

Invasive Pest and Disease Initiatives and the Biotechnology Regulatory Service

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Dr. Richard Dunkle began by summarizing his agency's activities in fighting the light brown apple moth in California, including aggressive mitigation and eradication strategies that include traps, quarantines and sharing resources with the California Department of Food and Agriculture. Dr. Dunkle progressed into other issues: how federal and state authorities are relegated to now managing Citrus Canker in Florida; why the Citrus Health Response Plan is being integrated in Florida for various pests and diseases; and the work being done to combat citrus greening, plum box virus, potato cyst nematodes, and how the Farm Bill could help develop and support regulatory measures.

Following a question-and-answer session, Dr. Dunkle introduced Rebecca Besh, who described the Biotechnology Regulatory Service, which under the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service office, implements regulations and issues permits for certain genetically engineered organisms to protect plant health. Ms. Besh highlighted the Environmental Impact Statement that she predicted will clear the Office of Management and Budget and will be published by August 2007.

Specialty Crop Food Safety Research Initiatives

Dr. Mary Torrence, from the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, explained her agency's work with land grant universities and with government agencies to administer competitive grant programs. Dr. Torrence then described some of the produce-related food safety research projects being funded in 2007, along with their funding allocations, to look at various viruses and microbes in field and laboratory settings. When addressing the focus studies that determine the detection methods and set priorities of produce items to be researched by scientists, Dr. Torrence encouraged and invited dialogue with industry groups.

The Agriculture Research Service's Dr. James Lindsay followed by first describing his agency's nationwide sites where scientists conduct food safety research, highlighting advances in sensor technology that will be implemented later this year to help detect microbial contamination in farming and packing facilities, and raising the contentious issues of using low dose radiation on produce, an "additive" that can not be used on organic produce. In addition to a host of other projects and topics, Dr. Lindsay stressed the importance of the produce industry's involvement in a Quantitative Risk Assessment along with government agencies involved in working to protect the U.S. food supply.

Food Stamp Program and Other Domestic Food Assistance Programs

The Food and Nutrition Service's Clarence Carter provided an overview of the Food Stamp Program and how it supplements low income families' abilities to purchase healthy and nutritious food. At the Committee's request, Mr. Carter listed the states with the highest and lowest eligible recipient participation in the program. He then elaborated on recent developments to remove the stigma that comes with recipients using food stamps, including renaming the program and replacing traditional coupons with ATM-like cards to be used at check-out lines. When asked how much actual produce is purchased under the Food Stamp Program, Mr. Carter said that that information is captured when one's card is swiped at checkout, and he would provide that information to the Advisory Committee in a timely manner.

Food Safety and California Leafy Green Marketing Agreement

The chair of the Advisory Committee's Food Safety Working Group, Jeff Crist, began the afternoon discussion on food safety by speaking about his working group's activities since the full Advisory Committee's January 2007 meeting. Those activities included meeting by conference calls on three occasions and developing draft recommendations for the full Advisory Committee's consideration.

Advisory Committee member Matt McInerney updated his fellow members on the status of the California Leafy Green Marketing Agreement, a regulation that requires signatory handlers of leafy greens in the state to source solely from growers whose operations successfully passed a Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) audit performed by USDA Federal-State Inspection Service personnel. Those handlers also have to adhere to Good Handling Practices (GHPs). Mr. McInerney estimated that 99 percent of the leafy green industry in California, or 111 different handlers, have signed the agreement, which went into affect in April 2007.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture's John Dyer expanded upon Mr. McInerney's information by highlighting the State statute that authorizes the marketing agreement. Mr. Dyer also clarified the appropriate use of the certification marks on the product and related stamps on transmittal documents.

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Kathy Staley updated Advisory Committee members on ongoing federal activities to enhance food safety related audit programs for industry customers. Ms. Staley emphasized activities in: (1) helping nationwide producers more fully understand GAP and GHP audit requirements; (2) boosting the number of nationwide Federal-State Inspection Service personnel who perform audits to more than 200 individuals; (3) strengthening USDA inspection services to include traceability back to the package level; and (4) helping program partners in California and Florida enhance their audit services.

Randle Macon, also from the Agricultural Marketing Service, presented the progress his staff has made in enhancing the Qualified Through Verification (QTV) program. Highlights of the developments to the program, which is a voluntary audit-based service offered to the fresh-cut produce industry since 1996, include: (1) requiring raw produce suppliers applying to the QTV program to submit to a GAP/GHP audit; (2) considering California Leafy Green Marketing Agreement signatory handlers as meeting QTV requirements; and (3) submitting the QTV program to Agriculture Research Service scientists for review.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m. on June 4, 2007, and reconvened at 8:00 a.m. on June 5, 2007.

The Advisory Committee spent the remainder of the meeting talking about California's leafy green marketing agreement and the need for food safety standards throughout the United States. Its members agreed that national GAP and GHP standards are preferable over adhoc standards now required by receivers and others in the marketing chain; however, they agreed further discussion and more sound science are necessary to resolve commodity-specific issues, regional difference, and the inherent sanitary risks associated with different commodities.

The Advisory Committee approved the following recommendations for the Secretary of Agriculture's consideration:

- **Recommendation:** The Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee strongly recommends the Department of Agriculture facilitate and advocate the development and adoption of unified food safety standards for the fruit and vegetable industry that reflect the risks associated with individual commodities and the entire supply chain.

- **Recommendation:** Recognizing the significant contributions the specialty crop industry makes to the American diet, U.S. agriculture, and the economies of the states in which they are produced, the Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee believes fruit and vegetable growers should receive equitable treatment in federal farm programs. Accordingly, the Committee commends Secretary Johanns for his strong support of the fruit and vegetable industry and notes with interest the specific recommendations relating to specialty crops contained in USDA's 2007 Farm Bill Proposals. In addition to the Department's recommendations, the Committee recommends that USDA consider the following:
 - Support the provisions of the EAT Healthy America Act (HR 1600) and the Specialty Crops Competition Act of 2007 (S 1160), which provide needed assistance to fruit and vegetable producers in critical areas such as conservation, international trade, pests and disease, nutrition, research, block grants to states, and renewable energy; and

 - Reconsider its position advocating the elimination of the fruit and vegetable planting restriction on program crop acres. The removal of this important provision would place unsubsidized fruit and vegetable producers at a competitive disadvantage to subsidized program crop producers.

Andrew Hatch
AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs
July 2, 2007