

USDA INSPECTION SERVICES: A helpful Tool for the International Fruit and Vegetable Industry

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SELLING PRODUCE IN THE U.S. CAN BE CHALLENGING, BUT THERE ARE RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU MEET THESE CHALLENGES. YOUR CUSTOMS BROKER CAN NAVIGATE THE RULES AND REGULATIONS NECESSARY TO EXPORT PRODUCE INTO THE U.S., BUT YOU MAY NEED ADDITIONAL HELP.

The USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) offers inspection and grading services, valuable tools for the global fruit and vegetable industry. In addition, your buyer and industry trade associations can help with marketing and other challenges.

Upon request, any party with an ownership stake in a shipment of fresh or processed produce can request an official USDA inspection. Inspections provide an unbiased, independent certification of the quality and/or condition of products in domestic and international marketing systems. For sellers, these services demonstrate that products meet specific grade or contract requirements; for buyers, grading services ensure that the expected quality is being delivered.



"It's always important to be sure that trading partners are specific about their expectations. Using the USDA inspection service can help you know whether your supply chain partners have met those expectations. It benefits both the seller and the buyer," said Nancy Tucker, vice president of Global Development for the Produce Marketing Association (PMA), a leading industry trade association whose members often rely on the USDA inspection services.

While most customers contract with USDA to inspect a shipment for quality, weight, size, count and other commodity specific conditions, inspectors also can assess a number of conditions related to the shipment. For example, inspectors can visually inspect or measure the ambient temperature of the shipping container. In addition to a written inspection report, customers can also request that USDA provide digital photographs to support an inspection result.

USDA PARTNERS WITH INDUSTRY TRADE ASSOCIATIONS FOR EDUCATION

USDA partners with a variety of industry associations such as PMA, to educate the international produce industry about resources offered by USDA to assist companies doing business in the U.S. For example, last year a USDA staff member delivered a presentation at PMA's "Fresh Connections: Central America" educational event held in Guatemala. The conference helped Central American growers and others along the supply chain get a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of selling in the U.S. "Our members in Central America appreciated hearing first hand from USDA about some of their rights and responsibilities when exporting to the U.S.," said Kathy Means, vice president of PMA's Government Relations and Public Affairs.

USDA OFFICE LOCATIONS & HOW TO REQUEST AN INSPECTION

USDA maintains a network of nearly 100 offices in the U.S., with locations at most of the major terminal markets and ports of entry. This includes a partnership with most of the state departments of agriculture to provide inspection support in locations USDA does not cover.

To request an inspection of fresh produce, contact (800) 560-7956, select option #3 or visit www.ams.usda.gov/freshinspection. To request an inspection of processed fruit and vegetable products, contact (202) 720-4693 or www.ams.usda.gov/processedinspection.

AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs helps U.S. and international produce buyers and sellers market their perishable products in the most efficient manner possible through distribution channels. To learn more about inspections and other services offered by AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs, visit



▲ An inspection by USDA helps both the seller and the buyer assuring they are fulfilling their expectations in every operation.

www.ams.usda.gov/fv or contact Christopher Purdy (202) 720-3209 or christopher.purdy@ams.usda.gov.

PMA is a global not-for-profit trade association representing companies that market fresh fruits, vegetables, and related products. The association's programs promote the efficient distribution and increased consumption of members' products around the world. For additional information about PMA, visit www.pma.com/resources/government-relations/navigating-government-agencies or contact Nancy Tucker (302) 738-7100 ext. 3005 or ntucker@pma.com.



USDA INSPECTIONS CAN BE USED AS:

- Evidence of compliance or noncompliance of contract specifications
- Evidence of compliance or noncompliance with marketing order and agreement requirements, state regulations, and mandated import and export inspection requirements for several products
- Factual evidence
- Quality control
- Establishing product value
- Making and obtaining loans
- Settling claims
- Basis for acceptance or rejection of a shipment.