



Spring / Summer 2016

Specialty Crops Program News

AMS Specialty Crops Program Headlines

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Welcome to the first 2016 issue of [AMS Specialty Crops Program](#) (SCP) News. In this issue, we are excited to share some leadership changes, provide practical tips to help your business every day, and talk about some new services and happenings around the Program.



Charles W. Parrott
Deputy Administrator
Specialty Crops Program

We welcome [Elanor Starmer](#) as the Administrator of the [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#). Ms. Starmer has been with the USDA since 2011, serving the Secretary as a senior policy advisor in the organic, local, and specialty crops areas. In that capacity, she has coordinated the Department's work on local and regional food systems, including overseeing the [Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative](#); acted as liaison to U.S. Food Drug Administration (FDA) on the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and developed a Department-wide strategy to support industry on FSMA implementation; and handled a variety of other issues, including specialty crops and value-added agriculture. We join Ms. Starmer's commitment to creating new market opportunities for farmers, ranchers and food business of all sizes. Also, we look forward to working with you – to do just that for the specialty crops industry.



Elanor Starmer
Administrator
AMS Programs

In this issue of SCP News, we'll introduce a number of new people, new services, and new resources that are all focused on helping you reach your goals. Read on to meet our new PACA Division Director Judith Rudman. Take a look at how our Streamlined User-Fee Process is benefitting both industry and government; how the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee is working for you; and, how our new GroupGAP program may be just the food safety certification program you need. We're also rolling out new FSMA and PACA resources, as well as exciting new offerings in our ongoing webinar series. And, as always, round it out with "An Ounce of Prevention" to help you avoid trade disputes!

Industry and Government Benefit from Streamlined User-Fee Rulemaking

As a predominantly user fee-funded agency, [USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#) is committed to cost-effective and transparent operations and processes. Recently AMS streamlined the fee setting process, to better serve industry.

AMS provides voluntary grading, inspection, laboratory analysis, audit verification and certification services for fruit and vegetable handlers and processors, meat, poultry and egg establishments, dairy processors, cotton producers and other parts of the agriculture sector to facilitate marketing and communicate quality attributes to consumers. AMS quality assurance programs tell consumers and businesses that an impartial, unbiased third-party has assessed the quality and verified various aspects of their products. Through the delivery of these programs AMS facilitates marketing of more than \$150 billion worth of agricultural products that help to fuel America's agricultural economy.



Christopher Purdy
Associate Deputy Administrator
AMS Specialty Crops Program

Under the previous fee setting process, timing was hard to predict. The new process addresses that and reduces the number of regulations that are published. Our action also supports USDA's goal of being more open and transparent.

Under the new system, AMS will announce user fee adjustments by publishing a single Federal Register notice before June 1, 2016, based on standardized formulas we apply to each service. This action provides all stakeholders information about how AMS sets the fees. It also helps them to better plan for the cost of those services, as all the fees are now established at the same time each year. Fee adjustments will enable AMS to continue its mission of administering programs that create domestic and international marketing opportunities for U.S. producers of food, fiber, and specialty crops while ensuring the quality and availability of wholesome food for consumers across the country.

AMS Specialty Crops Program Welcomes New PACA Division Director



Dr. Melissa R. Bailey
Associate Deputy Administrator
AMS Specialty Crops Program

The [AMS Specialty Crops Program](#) is excited about our most recent addition to serve the fruit and vegetable industry. Judith Wey Rudman is the new Director of the [Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act \(PACA\) Division](#). Judy brings with her diverse expertise in trade and compliance to support the PACA mission of ensuring fair trade in the produce industry. Prior to joining PACA, Judy served as the Director for Bilateral Agreements at the U.S. Department of Commerce, where she spent nearly 20 years working with industry leaders on the Mexican tomato suspension agreement. Judy was instrumental in incorporating PACA enforce-



Judith W. Rudman
Director, PACA Division
AMS Specialty Crops Program

ment provisions into the Agreement. While at Commerce, Judy was responsible for administering all aspects of anti-dumping and countervailing duty (AD/CVD) cases under the trade remedy laws. She has administered cases on various agricultural products, including lemon juice from Argentina and Mexico, Chilean frozen raspberries, cattle from Canada and Mexico, and sugar from Mexico. Prior to her federal service, Judy worked in the South Asia Division at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Judy has a B.A. in International Relations from Knox College, an M.A. in Political Science from Tulane University, and a Master's in Education from Marymount University. She may be reached at (202) 720-4180 or judithw.rudman@ams.usda.gov.

Is GroupGAP Right For You?

Consumer demand for locally sourced food is increasing, and is creating excellent marketing opportunities for the specialty crops industry. Unfortunately, there historically has been an obstacle to bringing fresh, local foods into larger retail markets. Many farmers, and especially small and mid-sized producers, have been challenged to demonstrate compliance with food safety standards, and the requirements of retail, institutional, and other buyers. Until now. The AMS Specialty Crops Program is pleased to introduce GroupGAP, a new food safety certification program designed to increase opportunities for the entire specialty crops industry to supply and buy USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) -certified produce.

Many producers rely on USDA GAP certification to verify that their operations are following industry-recognized food safety practices and recommendations of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Until now, becoming USDA GAP-certified had been challenging for some individuals.

Our new GroupGAP service changes all of that. This new program makes USDA GAP certification accessible and affordable for all growers. Under the GroupGAP program, growers of any size, as well as established grower groups like food hubs and other marketing organizations, and even research and promotion programs, can be USDA GAP-certified as a group. While we focused our efforts during a 3-year pilot program on smaller producers, the GroupGAP concept is applicable to all growers, regardless of their size or markets.

For purposes of the GroupGAP Program, any group of producers and/or supply chain partners who come together to implement a shared food safety program can be considered a group. Group members share resources and work together under a common on-farm food safety program and Quality Management System to meet the requirements of both the USDA GAP program and their buyers. In addition to determining its own composition, the group also decides which commodities are covered by the certification. And, groups can choose to certify against any current USDA GAP standard audit, including GAP&GHP, Harmonized Produce GAP, or Mushroom GAP, and may include additional scopes such as food defense or the Global Markets Addendum.



Ken Petersen
Chief
Audit Services Branch
SCI Division

AMS Webinar: Is GroupGAP Right For You?

Thursday, March 24, 2106 2PM (est)

Register at: <https://amsfv.webex.com/amsfv/onstage/g.php?MTID=e951ab6c4e8e07c91cfcd68a69945c300>

GroupGAP also has the potential to verify compliance with the on-farm food safety requirements of the FDA's new Food Safety Modernization Act. AMS is working with the FDA to ensure the alignment of the USDA GAP program to FSMA regulations. In some cases, the USDA GAP requirements may be more stringent than those in FSMA since the GAP programs also take into consideration industry best practices and buyers' requirements.

GroupGAP requires two layers of audits. The first is internal production site audits of all group members conducted by the group's own internal auditor. The second layer of audits is the formal GroupGAP system audit conducted by USDA. This latter audit focuses primarily on the group as a whole to determine if it has fully implemented its Quality Management System, conducted the internal audits, and taken corrective actions on any non-conformances. USDA will conduct onsite audits on a randomly selected percentage of growers. At a minimum, we will look at the square root of the number of growers; so for a 164 grower group, we would look at a minimum of 13 growers as part of the annual system audit.

For certification, the group itself will be listed as a certified entity and each grower within the group will be listed as certified as part of the larger group.

(Cont. on Page 4)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800)795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Is GroupGAP Right For You? (cont. from Page 3)

USDA is already working with many different buyers in the retail and foodservice communities to promote acceptance of GroupGAP, and all of the food safety audit-based programs we offer. And, the school lunch program and other USDA commodity purchase programs will accept GroupGAP certification.

For growers, the new GroupGAP Certification Program streamlines the audit process, making USDA GAP food safety certification accessible. By meeting GroupGAP requirements, group members are creating a strong food safety program that will satisfy their buyers and create success by opening doors to new, larger, more stable, and more lucrative markets. Interested growers should learn more about the program now, form their groups, and start preparing Quality Management Systems.

For buyers, GroupGAP provides assurance that grower groups are following verified food safety best practices. Look for GroupGAP-certified producers who can increase your supply of, and meet consumer demand for, a greater diversity and quantity of fresh, local products.

GroupGAP officially launches on April 4, 2016. At that time, we will begin accepting applications to take part in the GroupGAP Certification Program. For at least 2016, we are restricting participation in the program to domestic groups. If you represent a group of international producers, please let us know your interest in the program for 2017 and beyond so we can consider how we can best meet your needs for coming years.

We look forward to serving producers of all sizes with our new GroupGAP Certification Program. For more information on GroupGAP, access our website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/groupgap>. If you would like, please contact any time by email at GroupGAP@ams.usda.gov.

PACA Division Creates Online Training Workbook

The AMS [Specialty Crops Program \(SCP\)](#) works to improve services and benefits to the industries we serve. To that end, the AMS [Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act \(PACA\) Division](#) recently posted a training workbook on its internet site. The workbook is a comprehensive resource designed for the produce industry to use. It covers the rights and responsibilities of companies involved in the fruit and vegetable industry. The workbook is published and posted on the SCP website and can be found at the following link (<http://www.ams.usda.gov/publications/content/paca-training-workbook>).

The workbook gives the history of the PACA and the structure of how it functions to serve the produce industry. The workbook increases accessibility and efficiency when seeking answers; the table of contents has active links so you can click on the topic of interest and be directed straight to the desired information. Some of the most important subjects that are covered in the workbook are: how to file a complaint with PACA; how the complaint process works; the many aspects of contract disputes; how PACA can help mediate a produce dispute in a cost and time effective manner; and how the [PACA Trust](#) works and how it protects the industry financially, including steps to be taken to preserve your PACA Trust rights. The workbook also provides various ways to contact the PACA Division for assistance in any situation that arises while working within the fruit and vegetable industry. We hope this workbook will be a valuable asset to you and your company, so please take full advantage of this resource. Please contact the PACA Division with any thoughts or questions at 800-495-PACA.



Travis Hubbs
Assistant Director
Eastern Region
PACA Division

Specialty Crops Division — A FSMA Resource for You



Leanne Skelton
USDA Liaison to FDA
Specialty Crops Program

The [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#), [Agricultural Marketing Service \(AMS\)](#) and the [United States Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#), [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) share a robust working relationship when it comes to the [2011 Food Safety Modernization Act \(FSMA\)](#), specifically between FDA and [AMS' Specialty Crops Program \(SCP\)](#). FDA's suite of seven preventive controls regulations that may impact you as a customer of SCP shift the focus from responding to food contamination after it occurs to preventing it in the first place. Five of these seven regulations are final and were published in the Federal Register between September and November 2015. The other two regulations should be finalized by FDA in the coming months. Applicability to your business will depend on the activities at your operation and the size of your farm and/or facility or your supplier's farm and/or facility.

For SCP's customers, our focus is on three of the seven FDA regulations:

- [Produce Safety](#) -- impacting produce farms and most packinghouses;
- [Preventive Controls for Human Food \(PCHF\)](#) -- impacting fruit and vegetable processing/manufacturing facilities and some "off-farm" packinghouses; and
- [Foreign Supplier Verification Program \(FSVP\)](#) -- impacting importers of produce and processed fruits and vegetables.

Most packinghouses will likely fall under the definition of "farm" and be subject to the Produce Safety regulation; some packinghouses will fall out of the farm definition and be subject to the PCHF regulation. Each of the three has exemptions for the smallest categories of farms and businesses along with some other exemptions and exclusions. FDA created a "Decision Tree" on ["Standards for Produce Safety: Coverage and Exemptions"](#) to help farms understand whether they are subject to or exempt from the Produce Safety regulation or subject to the PCHF regulation; you may access it here. FDA has also developed a portal for you to submit questions on any of the FSMA regulations, the education and outreach activities, training strategy, research initiatives, and implementation and compliance strategy; it is linked here. To get the most comprehensive response tailored to your farm or facility, be sure to include details of the specific circumstances you are asking about.

How can SCP help you understand and comply with the new regulations? Each final regulation includes three dates to be mindful of:

- Publication date - when the regulation was actually published in the Federal Register (i.e., the official daily journal of the US Government).
- Effective date - when the regulation is effective and is usually 60 days after the publication date.
- Compliance date(s) - the specific date(s) on which the regulated community must be in compliance with the requirements of the particular regulation.

For each of these rules, FDA is providing for extended and staggered compliance dates based on the size of a farm or facility.

- For a farm, the size designations are measured in the dollar value of annual produce sales (over a rolling average of the 3 previous years) for farms categorized as "very small," "small" and "all others" (i.e., larger than very small or small).
- For a facility, the size designations are measured in dollar value of annual food sales plus the market value of food held without sale (over a rolling average of the 3 previous years) for facilities categorized as "very small" and the number of full-time equivalent employees including subsidiary and affiliated facilities for facilities categorized as "small" and as "all others."

(Cont. on Page 6)

Specialty Crops Division — A FSMA Resource for You (Cont. from Page 5)

Compliance dates for the Produce Safety rule based on the January 26, 2016 effective date range from:

- 3, 2, and 1 years for “very small,” “small” and “all others” sized sprout growers, respectively; and
- 4, 3, and 2 years for “very small,” “small” and “all others” sized operations that grow, harvest, pack and store produce subject to the rule.

For facilities, the compliance dates are based on the publication date and range from 3, 2 or 1 year for “very small,” “small” and “all others” sized businesses, respectively. Each regulation also includes some additional time to comply with a few specific requirements. However, even with these dates in the future, we want you to be aware now so you’ll have time to prepare well before the applicable compliance date.

Resources available on-line. If you have internet access, there are numerous resources available to you on-line from USDA and FDA. If you do not have internet access, contact us and we’ll work with you to obtain the information. On November 12, 2015 SCP hosted a webinar on FDA’s regulations which focused on the Preventive Controls for Human Foods rule titled, [“FSMA is Here: Are You Ready?”](#). On April 21, 2016 SCP will host a webinar, [“Standards for the Growing, Harvesting, Packing and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption, i.e. the Produce Safety Regulation”](#) focusing on the Produce Safety Rule. You may also find information relating to our USDA Good Agricultural Practices Audit Verification Program [here](#). The FDA has a variety of resource materials on their FSMA website, accessible [here](#). You can find FDA’s final regulations and the remaining proposed regulations, training strategy document, and other information you may find helpful as you consider your compliance status and marketplace demands.

In our next issue, I’ll focus on USDA’s commitment to your education and training, and its vital role in helping farmers implement and comply with the new regulations. I’ll also detail the educational components of FDA’s implementation strategy via the Produce Safety Alliance (PSA), the Food Safety Preventive Controls Alliance (FSPCA), and the Sprout Safety Alliance. Please contact me at (202) 720-0982 or leanne.skelton@ams.usda.gov.

Ensuring High Standards for Fruits and Vegetables Going to Schools

[AMS’s Commodity Procurement Division](#) buys a variety of domestically produced and processed commodity food products through a competitive process among approved vendors who have demonstrated their commitment to



Albert Hoover
Head, Federal Management
Inspection Program
Specialty Crops Inspection Division

ensuring the safety of their products. AMS requires each grower or processor interested in selling to the USDA meet standards to ensure the safety and quality of the food we purchase. Our employees play a vital role in this program by performing a variety of audits, including Food Defense, [Good Agricultural Practices/Good Handling Practices \(GAP/GHP\)](#), and [Domestic Origin Verification \(DOV\) audits](#), among others. All fruit and vegetable products must be inspected for quality and condition, and meet the highest grade standards. Staff from [AMS’s Specialty Crops Inspection \(SCI\) Division](#) certifies products and shipments meet U.S. Grade Standards and other contract specifications. This activity supports American agriculture by encouraging consumption of domestic foods, including food for millions of children



Marc McFetridge
Agricultural Economist
Promotion & Economics Division

participating in the [USDA National School Lunch Program](#) throughout the country. Additionally, this food goes to food banks and disaster relief organizations, among other outlets.

In addition to the regular purchases we make each week, in time of oversupply the Secretary may approve “bonus purchases”. These purchases by AMS help U.S. farmers by removing excess supply, stabilizing prices, and balancing supply and demand while providing nutritious food to those in need. Visit with us on-line to learn about product specifications and standards and how to become a USDA approved vendor. Please contact Al Hoover at albert.hoover@ams.usda.gov or Marc McFetridge at marc.mcfetridge@ams.usda.gov if you have any questions.

“An Ounce of Prevention” — Organic Produce

Welcome back to another edition of the PACA’s “An Ounce of Prevention” for the Specialty Crops industry. Have you been eating your five servings of fruits and vegetables every day? Have you been exercising regularly? That’s good advice when it comes to preventing sickness, but let’s talk ‘Preventative Medicine” for your produce business. We are about halfway through our series of articles about certain commodities that while being traded, have a tendency to result in disputes. I thought we would take this opportunity to talk about a subject that is important for your business: **“Organic Produce”**.

In the case study below, we address important issues regarding use of the term Organic Produce.

Q. What does Organic Produce mean anyway?

A. Organic is a labeling term for food or other agricultural products produced according to the USDA organic regulations. These methods integrate cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that support the cycling of on-farm resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve biodiversity. Synthetic fertilizers, sewage sludge, irradiation, and genetic engineering may not be used.

Q. Who makes sure the produce is organic?

A. The USDA’s [National Organic Program](#) regulates all organic crops, livestock, and agricultural products certified to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) organic standards. Organic certification agencies inspect and verify that organic farmers, ranchers, distributors, processors, and traders are complying with the USDA organic regulations. USDA conducts audits and ensures that the nearly 80 organic certification agencies operating around the world are properly certifying organic products. In addition, USDA conducts investigations and enforcement activities to ensure all products labeled as organic meet USDA organic regulations. In order to sell, label, or represent their products as organic, operations must follow all of the specifications set out by the USDA organic regulations.

Q. Who must be certified?

A. All operations that sell, label, or represent their products as organic or as having been produced or handled using organic methods must be certified, except:

- Those whose gross annual income from organic products is less than \$5,000.
- Retail food establishments, such as grocery stores or restaurants.
- Brokers, distributors, and traders who handle only pre-packaged items.
- Those that handle products containing organic ingredients (excluding salt and water), but make no organic claims other than identifying organic ingredients on the product information panel.



Robert Parker
Assistant to the Chief
Dispute Resolution Branch
PACA Division

Q. My imported shipment of organic produce was treated to destroy plant pests that were detected. Can I still sell my product as organic?

A. Treatments that involve the use of ionizing radiation or fumigation with prohibited substances, like methyl bromide, affect the status of imported organic produce. When an imported shipment is fumigated using a substance prohibited for use in the handling of organic agricultural products, and that product comes into contact with the fumigating agent, or the product in any instance undergoes treatment using ionizing radiation, it can no longer be sold, labeled or represented as organic. The sale or labeling of such products as organically produced or handled may result in compliance action against certified operations.

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AMS Specialty Crops Program News is a newsletter written and produced by the staff of AMS Specialty Crops Program for the produce industry. Send your comments to the SCP Newsletter Editor Jeffrey Davis at jeffrey.davis4@ams.usda.gov

“An Ounce of Prevention” — Organic Produce (Cont. from Page 7)

Q. What can happen to a business labeling something organic and it is not?

A. Depending on the nature of the violation, a business could be subject to civil penalties of up to \$11,000 per violation and/or suspension or revocation of its organic certification. A suspended or revoked operation cannot sell, label, or represent its products as organic. Once the suspended operation meets any specified waiting period and can demonstrate full compliance with the USDA organic regulations, it can request that the National Organic Program reinstate its organic certificate.

Q. Can an organic violation affect my PACA license?

A. Absolutely. If you label your cartons organic and the product is not organic, that is a misbranding violation under PACA. The PACA regulations state that it is a violation of section 2(5) of the Act for a licensee to misrepresent by word, act, mark, stencil, label, statement, or deed, the character, kind, grade, quality, quantity, size, pack, weight, condition, degree, or maturity, or State, country, region of origin of any perishable agricultural commodity received, shipped, sold, or offered to be sold in interstate or foreign commerce.

Q. What are the penalties for misbranding under PACA?

A. Misbranding violations under PACA range from serious, very serious, or repeated and/or flagrant, depending upon the circumstances. The penalties start as a written warning and can go all the way to having your PACA license revoked.

I hope this sheds some light on issues that come up frequently when encountering the trade term Organic Produce. You may always reach PACA at our customer service line 800-495-7222 or online at <http://www.ams.usda/paca>. Keep an eye out for the next dose of “Preventative Medicine” on a commonly traded commodity.

2016 Farmers Market & Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) & Specialty Crops Block Grant Program (SCBGP) Funding Available

\$26 Million in funding is now available for the fiscal year 2016 Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) and \$62.9 Million for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). To find information on how to apply to these programs or become an application reviewer, please visit <https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants>. Please see the link to the Stakeholder Announcements below.

FMLFPP - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/content/usda-offers-webinars-local-food-systems-grant-applicants-26-million-now-available-grant>

Those interested in applying to FMLFPP and have questions may email USDALFPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov or USDAFMPPQuestions@ams.usda.gov .

SCBGP - <https://www.ams.usda.gov/content/stakeholder-announcement-62-million-grant-funding-available-assist-specialty-crop-industry>

Those interested in applying to the SCBGP should do so directly through their state department of agriculture, which administer a competitive grant process. A listing of the SCBGP’s state contacts, and how to apply with state application due dates, may be found at www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp.



USDA Fruit & Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee Wants You!

One of the ways that AMS serves America's diverse agricultural industry is through the coordination and oversight of federal advisory committees. Transparency and objectivity within these committees is crucial to the long term guidance and success of the industries served by the USDA. By leveraging expertise from the private sector, they help shape and ensure the future of American agriculture. The USDA [Fruit & Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee \(FVIAC\)](#) specifically serves all aspects of the produce industry and plays an important role in helping to shape and support some of the programs and services that the USDA provides to the industry.

Recently, the FVIAC was re-chartered for the 2015-2017 term. At the end of July 2016, 12 of the 25 seats will be vacated which will necessitate a call for nominations. A formal notice will be published in the Federal Register and other industry and organizational publications sometime during the second quarter of 2016. Fruit and vegetable industry members who are interested in submitting a nomination during the open notification period should note the following qualifications:

- You are actively working within the fruit and vegetable industry in the capacity of:
 - o Farmer/Producer/Grower/Shipper (must trade in some commercial capacity)
 - o Wholesaler/Distributor/Broker/Importer/Exporter
 - o Processor (fresh, frozen, dried, juice, canned, etc.)
 - o Restaurant/Retailer (including farmers markets, CSAs, food hubs, chefs)
 - o Foodservice suppliers
 - o Executives of State agencies involved in organic and non-organic fruits and vegetables at local, regional and national levels
 - o State departments of agriculture leadership (Secretary or Commissioner)
 - o Fruit and vegetable industry trade or commodity association leadership (National and State)
- You are actively able and willing to serve a minimum two year term (must attend a minimum of four meetings held in the Washington, DC region, and actively participate in additional ad hoc subcommittee/working group teleconference calls)
- You may not be serving or have been elected to concurrently serve on another USDA advisory committee, subcommittee or council.
- You are not registered as a lobbyist with the Federal, State, or local government
- You are not a Federal government employee.



Pamela Stanziani
Chief of Staff
Office of the Deputy Administrator
Designated Federal Official, FVIAC

Since its inception in 2001, the FVIAC meets a minimum of two times per year in Washington, DC, in addition to the working subgroups that meet multiple times via conference calls throughout the year. The Secretary appoints 25 members who are either self-nominated or nominated by other industry members and colleagues to serve two-year terms, and no member can serve more than six consecutive years or three consecutive terms if the charter is renewed. Their duty is to develop and submit recommendations to the Secretary on how USDA can tailor programs to better meet the needs of the U.S. produce industry with a focus on domestic operations and business practices throughout the supply chain. The FVIAC acts solely in an advisory capacity and is not a policy making body, with AMS oversight according to its charter and the [Federal Advisory Committee Act](#). The Committee is scheduled to meet on April 6-7, 2016 at the Hyatt Regency in Arlington, Virginia. All meetings are open to the public. For more information, visit the [FVIAC](#) webpage. You may also contact me at (202) 720-3334 or pamela.stanziani@ams.usda.gov.

Please check the Federal Register for the notice of the call for nominations and due dates.

AMS Specialty Crops Program Webinar Series



The [AMS Specialty Crops Program](#) Webinar Series continues to provide “need to know” information for the Specialty Crops industry, with useful tools providing practical information about USDA programs and services. Thousands of industry members across the United States and around the world participate in these free interactive webinars sponsored by the Specialty Crops Program (SCP). Topics recently covered include:



Jeffrey Davis
Business Development Specialist
AMS Specialty Crops Program

- Our Specialty Crops Inspection (SCI) Division hosted a November 12, 2015 presentation titled, [“New Markets & Growth Opportunities with GroupGAP”](#). Special attention was directed to the benefits of group certification for growers, buyers, and the supply chain. We focused on grower requirements, preparing for a group audit, and applying for group certification.
- The Transportation and Marketing (T&M) Program gave an instructional webinar for grantees November 20, 2015 titled, [“2015 Farmers Market & Local Food Promotion Program Terms & Conditions Training”](#). Emphasis was placed on issues like requesting payments, financial reporting, allowable costs, and seeking prior approval.
- "Marketing Orders and Agreements: Helping Farmers Help Themselves" was hosted December 3, 2015 by the [Marketing Orders & Agreements \(MOA\) Division](#) bringing attention to what marketing orders and agreements are and the benefits to the fruit, vegetable, and specialty crops industries. The webinar instructed how to establish one, as well as how they could be utilized at the onset of the FSMA Produce Safety Rule.
- On January 14, 2016 SCP partnered with the [USDA Science & Technology Program](#) to present a webinar on the [“Pesticide Data Program \(PDP\) – A Synopsis”](#). The program tests food products for pesticide residues, with an emphasis on the foods children eat. We detailed how PDP benefits the agriculture industry, how they collect and test food samples, who uses the data, and how you may access the data.
- AMS published a Final Rule to the Federal Register December 31, 2015 titled [Exemption of Organic Products from Assessment under a Commodity Promotion Law](#). On February 11, 2016 AMS posted a Notice to the Trade regarding the [Expansion of the Organic Assessment Exemption](#). SCP posted a presentation on the AMS website offering a historical perspective of the Organic Assessment Exemption, providing you an opportunity to better understand how the exemption will be applied to businesses under each of the commodity promotion programs and minimize confusion by clarifying how the change is separate from any proposed organic research and promotion program. It is accessible at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/report-presentation/organic-exemption> .

In the coming weeks, the AMS Specialty Crops Program webinar series tackles issues important to you.

- On March 17, 2016 the Specialty Crops Inspection Division will be hosting a webinar titled, [“Is GroupGAP Right for You?”](#) The nationwide rollout of the GroupGAP initiative begins in April, 2016, so consider registering [here](#) so you may learn more about this great opportunity.
- On April 21, 2016 Leanne Skelton, SCP’s FDA Liaison teams up with Dr. Samir Assar, Director of the FDA’s Division of Produce Safety in presenting updates on the FDA’s Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) [“Standards for the Growing, Harvesting, Packing and Holding of Produce for Human Consumption, i.e., the Produce Safety regulation”](#). In addition to the Produce Safety regulation, FDA is putting significant effort into strategies for implementation and compliance, training, and research. USDA is also leading a joint project with FDA to review its USDA GAPs program to ensure it aligns with the FDA Produce Safety regulation. Hear an overview of these initiatives by joining the webinar.

The AMS Specialty Crops Program Webinar Series is always looking for topical issues impacting the fruit, vegetable, and specialty crops industry. SCP would enjoy hearing from you! For more information, please contact me at jeffrey.davis4@ams.usda.gov .