

# FRUIT & VEGETABLE PROGRAMS NEWS

Volume I, Issue 3

Fall 2010

## Enhancing Our Outreach and Education Efforts

By Robert C. Keeney



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As part of the Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Fruit and Vegetable Programs ongoing effort to share information with the produce industry, we continue our expanded outreach through the utilization of webinars, conferences and other targeted events. The goal is to enhance the information flow so the entire industry – large and small – can benefit from the tools and services made available by AMS.

Outlined here are just a few of the ways that we are working to open up a window into our organization:

### **Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee.**

The 2009-2011 Fruit and

Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee held its inaugural meeting on March 30-31, 2010, in Washington, D.C. The meeting opened with a welcome from AMS Administrator Rayne Pegg and followed by USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan. Merrigan was quick to commend the committee members for their volunteer service, elaborating on their importance to the Obama Administration, and mentioned how they are truly considered the eyes and ears of the industry on behalf of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. She also emphasized the significance of their mission, which is to provide the Secretary and his Administration with valuable insight on how USDA can best help the entire industry flourish now and in the future.

A formal Federal Register notice will be published with additional details about future meetings.

**AMS, Fruit and Vegetable Programs News.** Many of you have seen our industry

newsletter highlighting news and services within AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs. **Webinars.** We are enhancing our Web-based outreach programming. For example, AMS has partnered with Red Book Credit Services on a series of educational webinars titled Red Book University.

**Industry Conferences and Meetings.** We are frequent speakers and exhibitors at industry events, such as the annual conferences held by the Produce Marketing Association and United Fresh Produce Association.

**Trade Journal Articles.** At the invitation of produce industry journals, our staff often contributes articles about issues of importance to the produce industry. For example, for several years we have contributed to the "Government Views" section of Blue Book Services, *Blue Prints*, a quarterly journal. If you have questions or additional ideas about different ways you might like to hear from us, please feel free to contact us.

### Inside this issue:

- **USDA Grants Support Specialty Crop Production**
- **PACA Searches Aid Decisionmakers**
- **Marketing Order Online Services System**
- **USDA Farm to School Program**
- **USDA Offers Produce Industry Training**

We want to hear from you.

What topics would you like to see covered in future editions of the newsletter?

Are there questions you can't find answers to on our Web site? Send your questions and suggestions to [FVInfo@ams.usda.gov](mailto:FVInfo@ams.usda.gov).

## USDA Grants Support Specialty Crop Production By Trista Etzig



**Trista Etzig** is the Project Manager of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. She can be reached at (202) 690-4942 or [trista.etzig@ams.usda.gov](mailto:trista.etzig@ams.usda.gov)



The funds distributed to the State departments of agriculture substantially increased from \$7 million in 2006 to \$55 million in 2010.

Since 2006, the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) has provided grants to State departments of agriculture, including more than 1,900 specialty crop projects throughout the United States and in five U.S. territories. The projects have all focused on enhancing the competitiveness of specialty crops, which are defined as

fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). The funds distributed to the State departments of agriculture substantially increased from \$7 million in 2006 to \$55 million in 2010.

Many of the projects administered by the State departments of agriculture place emphasis on child and

adult nutrition, sustainable agricultural practices, Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices, as well as improving food access in underserved communities. Projects include farm-to-school programs, extension of the growing season, research concerning increasing plant resistance to disease and pests, and development of storage and distribution efficiencies;

but, this is just a small sample of the many projects in SCBGP's portfolio.

To apply for funding, contact your local State department of agriculture. For more information, about the SCBGP and to identify State contacts, feel free to contact me directly or visit our Web site at [www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp](http://www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp).

## PACA Searches Aid Decisionmakers By Gary Nefferdorf



**Gary Nefferdorf** is the Assistant Regional Director of the PACA Branch. He can be reached at (703) 331-4550 or [gary.nefferdorf@ams.usda.gov](mailto:gary.nefferdorf@ams.usda.gov)

Making the business decision as to whom you would like to deal with in the produce industry, to buy from or sell to, can be tricky and difficult. The Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) Branch of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service has the resources available to help you in your decision.

PACA is a Federal law which facilitates fair trading practices in the marketing of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables in interstate and foreign commerce. In general, any person who buys or sells, in the chain of commerce,

fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables may be required to be licensed under the PACA. A major function of PACA is to help ensure that dealers of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables get what they pay for, and get paid for what they sell, including when their customers go out of business, declare bankruptcy, or simply refuse to pay for the fruits and vegetables received.

PACA's Web site, [www.ams.usda.gov/paca](http://www.ams.usda.gov/paca), provides a search option to see if the individual or firm you are considering has a current and valid PACA license. Just click on the link, "Search Current Licensees." There are fields

to enter the business's PACA license number, the business name, or the trade name. A license that shows "Active" means it is current and in good standing. A license that shows "Terminated" means the license was not renewed. If a firm or individual was cited for a violation of PACA Regulations, then the license will show either "Revoked" or "Suspended."

As always, you can call the PACA Branch at (800) 495-PACA (7222) and select option number "1" to be connected to the National License Center to directly inquire about a firm's or individual's PACA license.

# Marketing Order Import Compliance Improves With Use of Marketing Order Online Services System (MOLS) By Michael Durando



**Michael Durando** is the Chief of the Marketing Order Administration Branch. He can be reached at (202) 720-2491 or [michael.durando@ams.usda.gov](mailto:michael.durando@ams.usda.gov)

When Federal marketing orders are in place for specific fruits and vegetables, the products – whether produced domestically or imported – need to comply with grade, size, quality, volume, or other requirements. The Marketing Order Administration Branch (MOAB), which monitors all domestic and import activities and enforces those requirements, uses the Marketing Order Online Services System (MOLS) to track imported products entering the United States.

As imported products enter the United States, they can follow one of two paths:

- Sent directly to an exempted outlet such as processing, charity or animal feed, or
- Inspected by AMS fresh and processed product inspection personnel and evaluated according to the same minimum quality standards as set by domestic marketing orders.

If the products are destined for exempted outlets, the importer files the FV-6 “Importer’s Exempt Commodity” form. This can either be done prior to entry or immediately upon arrival into the United States.

If the products are intended for fresh market consumption and fail the minimum quality

requirements, importers may dispose of the failed products by destroying, reinspecting, reconditioning, or re-exporting them, or they can direct the failed shipment to an exempt use, again using the FV-6 form.

In the past, filing the FV-6 involved multiple forms and steps on the part of industry members. Since 2008, MOAB has used MOLS for the completion of the FV-6 form, improving efficiencies and allowing access to users 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

For more information about our services, contact me directly or visit our Web site at [www.ams.usda.gov/moab](http://www.ams.usda.gov/moab)

# USDA Farm to School Program Makes the Connection By Charles Parrott



**Charles Parrott** is the Associate Deputy Administrator of AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs. He can be reached at (202) 720-6393 or [charles.parrott@ams.usda.gov](mailto:charles.parrott@ams.usda.gov)

In an effort to connect schools (K - 12) with regional or local farms in order to serve healthy meals using locally produced foods, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has introduced the Farm-to-School initiative. Farm to school is part of a larger program, “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food,” which seeks to connect consumers with where their food comes from and how it gets to their plate.

Since the passage of the National School Lunch Act in 1946, key legislation has played an essential role in providing America’s children with access to healthier meals. Today, programs

like the National School Lunch Program and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program continue to provide nutritionally balanced and low-cost or free meals and snacks to children each school day. USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service and Food and Nutrition Service are focusing on Farm-to-School efforts that incorporate regional and local farm products into school meal programs. Schools and communities may initiate and support a variety of Farm-to-School activities, including nutrition education, agriculture-related lessons and curriculum, school or community gardens,

farm tours, taste testing, and parent/community educational sessions.

In addition, USDA recognizes the growing interest among school districts and communities to incorporate regionally and locally produced farm foods into the school nutrition programs. USDA is supporting Farm-to-School efforts through a number of initiatives, and continues to look for ways to help facilitate this important connection.

For more information about the Farm-to-School initiative, visit us at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/F2S/>

# USDA Offers Produce Industry Inspection Training By Cheri Courtney



**Cheri Courtney** is the Acting Chief of the Fresh Products Branch. She can be reached at (202) 720-5870 or [cheri.courtney@ams.usda.gov](mailto:cheri.courtney@ams.usda.gov)

The Fruit and Vegetable Programs of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service is offering produce inspection training courses for industry members in partnership with the United Fresh Research and Education Foundation.

The "Produce Inspection Training Program" is a series of training courses held throughout the year at the Training and Development Center in Fredericksburg, VA. The series focuses

on the application of U.S. grade standards for various commodities and associated evaluation procedures. Participants will have available to them the same instructors and state-of-the-art training facility and equipment that are used to train USDA's own inspectors. Topics include:

- Basic and/or advanced instruction on USDA grading and inspection procedures and certification of various fruits and vegetables;

- Understanding and applying U.S. grade standards;
  - Practical application to identify quality and condition defects that affect various products;
  - Tolerances and understanding when various products meet or fail to meet a grade standard; and
  - Hands-on grading exercises.
- For more information about the "Produce Inspection Training Program," contact Dr. Carl Newell at (540) 361-1120 or [carl.newell@ams.usda.gov](mailto:carl.newell@ams.usda.gov)

## News in Brief

**Proposed Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement**—USDA continues to review the record from the September and October 2009 hearings. The decision on whether to issue a Recommended Decision establishing the marketing agreement will be based on the information received during the hearings, and the public will be provided with another opportunity to provide further comments. For more information, visit [www.ams.usda.gov/moab](http://www.ams.usda.gov/moab)

**PACA Fee increase**—The Perishable Agricultural Commodity Act (PACA) license fee increase notice was submitted to the Federal Register on March 11, 2010. The comment period ended May 10, 2010. USDA is reviewing the posted comments and will submit a final rule to the Federal Register in the coming weeks. For more information visit [www.ams.usda.gov/paca](http://www.ams.usda.gov/paca)

**Commodity Procurement** – USDA has announced the additional purchase of more than 600,000 pounds of peeled baby carrots for the National School Lunch Program. For more information, visit [www.ams.usda.gov/fvprocurement](http://www.ams.usda.gov/fvprocurement)

Serving the produce industry since the early 1900s, the AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs fee-for-service programs are delivered via a network of trained and experienced staff. Our clients include growers, shippers, brokers, receivers, distributors, processors, retailers, and restaurants, among others.

Our services include:

- Audit-based programs
- International representation
- Commodity purchases
- Market News reports and information
- Establishment of U.S. Grade Standards
- Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA)
- Inspection and grading
- Self-help marketing programs
- Industry training
- Specialty Crop Block Grants

Additional information about AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs can be found at [www.ams.usda.gov/fv](http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv) or by contacting Christopher Purdy at 202-720-3209 or [christopher.purdy@ams.usda.gov](mailto:christopher.purdy@ams.usda.gov)

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