

standards for grades of canned beets; canned carrots; and canned white potatoes be reduced to the same percentage water capacity offered in the No. 303 container size, i.e. lowered by 9.02 percent. The No. 303 can size was chosen because the size relationship is closest to the No. 300 can. In consideration of this proposal, the Standardization Section of the Processed Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, initiated a study to review the current grade standards for canned root crop vegetables packed in No. 300 containers. Several companies were asked to submit data on drained weight for the two most prevalent styles of each canned root crop vegetable under consideration, mainly sliced and whole beets, diced and sliced carrots and sliced and whole potatoes. Seven PPB area field offices also collected samples and determined drained weight measurements for these commodities. The independent findings provided a cross-sectional representation of the marketplace and served as a benchmark for industry data. The drained weight data provided by the industry and by AMS for the No. 300 containers were then combined and examined. In 1996 the data and conclusions were published in a report on file with USDA titled, "Drained Weight Study, 1995 Report on Proposal to Lower Recommended Minimum Drained Weights for Root Vegetables Packed in No. 300 Containers."

The conclusions of the report do substantiate that there is some merit in the industry proposal to decrease the recommended minimum drained weights in the U.S. grade standards for canned beets; carrots; and white potatoes packed in No. 300 containers. Currently, the percentage water capacity, which is the ratio of the RMDWA and the water capacity of a container, is significantly higher in all cases for the smaller No. 300 container than for the No. 303 containers. For example, in diced beets, the RMDWA for the No. 300 container is 10.0 ounces, and the RMDWA for the No. 303 container is 10.5 ounces. The percent water capacity represented by 10.0 ounces is 65.8 percent, while 10.5 ounces represents a percent water capacity of only 62.3 percent.

Based on this information USDA has found that new RMDWA's for No. 300 containers, making the percentage water capacities more consistent with those of the No. 303 containers, should be considered.

Based on these findings, AMS agrees with the recommendations from NFPA and proposes to improve the United States Standards for Grades of Canned

Beets; Canned Carrots; and Canned White Potatoes by making changes to and adding the following tables: Canned Beets, Table I, adding Table IA, Canned Carrots, Table I, adding Table IA, and Canned White Potatoes, Table I and Table IA. Specifically, the changes will: (1) adjust the RMDWA's for No. 300 containers which were calculated using the percentage water capacity corresponding to No. 303 containers and lowered accordingly by 9.02 percent of the RMDWA of the 303 size container; and further improve the standards and promote consistency by (2) changing the format to include tables that will incorporate the water capacity of each container size; and (3) adding metric system tables to the canned beet and canned carrot standards.

These changes, if adopted, would improve the grade standards by making RMDWA's proportional for the No. 300 can size, ensure safety of the product, and help to facilitate the marketing of canned beets, carrots and white potatoes, allowing a more equitable marketing environment for the canning industry. The affected trade has recommended and reviewed these changes, therefore AMS is publishing this notice with a 60 day comment period which will provide sufficient amount of time for interested persons to comment on changes to the standards.

**Authority:** 7 U.S.C. 1621-1627.

Dated: January 9, 1998.

**Robert C. Keeney,**

*Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Agricultural Marketing Service

[FV-97-328N]

#### United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes

**AGENCY:** Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice.

**SUMMARY:** The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is soliciting comments on its proposal to change the voluntary United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes. Specifically, AMS proposes to lower the recommended drained weights for canned sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans by two percent. AMS has received petitions to revise the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes. The petitioners are

requesting a decrease in the recommended drained weight for sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans including No. 10 cans. The drained weight recommendations would also add No. 300 cans, a size pack which has been increasingly utilized in the industry. These changes would allow more equitable utilization of processed sweetpotatoes across domestic growing regions and will help the sweetpotato industry to meet its market needs.

**DATES:** Comments must be submitted on or before March 16, 1998.

**ADDRESSES:** Interested persons are invited to submit their written comments to Karen L. Kaufman, Processed Products Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, STOP 0247, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090-6456; faxed to (202) 690-1087; or e-mailed to Karen\_L\_Kaufman@usda.gov.

Comments should reference the date and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register**. The petitions and comments will be made available for public inspection at the above address during regular business hours.

The current United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes, along with the proposed changes, are available through the above addresses or by accessing AMS's Home Page on the Internet at: [www.ams.usda.gov/standards/vegcan.htm](http://www.ams.usda.gov/standards/vegcan.htm).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Karen L. Kaufman at (202) 720-5021.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Section 203(c) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, as amended, directs and authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture "to develop and improve standards of quality, condition, grade, and packaging and recommend and demonstrate such standards in order to encourage uniformity and consistency in commercial practices \* \* \*". The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is committed to carrying out this authority in a manner that facilitates the marketing of agricultural commodities. The United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes do not appear in the Code of Federal Regulations but are maintained by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Copies of official standards are available upon request.

AMS is proposing to change the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes using the procedures it published in the August 13, 1997, **Federal Register** and that appear in part 36 of title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (7 CFR part 36). Specifically, AMS is proposing to lower the recommended drained weight for

sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans, including No. 10 size cans, by two percent. The drained weight criteria for the No. 300 can, a size pack which has been increasingly utilized in the industry, would also be added. This change would allow a more equitable marketing environment for domestic sweetpotato processors.

AMS received petitions from the Sweet Potato Council of the United States, and the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission and three processors requesting the revision of the United States Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes.

The petitioners represent a significant part of the canned sweetpotato industry. The Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina sweetpotato industry provides over half of the sweetpotatoes produced domestically.<sup>1</sup>

The petitions indicate that the recommended drained weights for canned sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans, as shown in the U.S. Standards for Grades of Canned Sweetpotatoes, are difficult to meet and put sweetpotato processors at an economic disadvantage in marketing these products.

The reasons given for this disparity are that the changes in the varietal types of sweetpotatoes and the growing conditions in the growing regions have changed significantly since the current Recommended Minimum Drained Weight Averages (RMDWA's) were first proposed 21 years ago. Prior to 1985, there were several varieties of sweetpotatoes utilized in canned sweetpotatoes. These varieties were Centennial, Jewel, Gold Rush, and others. Since 1989, the fresh sweetpotato market has predominantly switched to marketing the Beauregard variety because of its improved quality characteristics and yield potential. Surplus sweetpotatoes from the fresh market have traditionally supplied canning operations. Since 1989, processors have noted that the sweetpotatoes they have been using have lower total solids and lower densities than previously used varieties. As part of the industry petition to review the RMDWA's for canned sweetpotatoes, USDA requested that the sweetpotato industry submit data covering several seasons to provide evidence of this processing condition. Data was collected from plants located in Louisiana, Mississippi, and North Carolina covering several processing seasons.

The petitioners stated that to meet the standard when packing certain newer

varieties of sweetpotatoes (i.e. Beauregard), the cans must be over-filled. This condition may cause damage to the sweetpotatoes resulting in downgrading the product, and may have an adverse effect on the integrity of the can seam closure. If the seal's integrity is lost during processing, the product's wholesomeness is jeopardized.

The petitioners contend that a unilateral reduction in drained weight requirements in the grade standard is indicated due to the varietal characteristics of sweetpotatoes currently available for processing.

AMS has reviewed the petitions and data submitted, and has gathered information from government and industry sources. Initial findings do substantiate that there may be a disparity between the drained weights for canned sweetpotatoes processed before 1985 and those processed since the newer varieties have become predominant.

One study showed that in 1989, a producer maintained an average fill weight of 72.8 ounces. The resulting drained weights failed to meet the minimum of 73.0 ounces in only 31 percent of production. By 1995, the average fill weight had been raised to 77.2 ounces, a full 4.2 ounces over the minimum drained weight. Despite this increase, 55 percent of production failed to meet 73 ounces after processing. This overfill not only penalized the processor financially but also threatened product quality and wholesomeness.

AMS is continuing to gather drained weight information on the newer varieties of sweetpotatoes to ascertain an equitable recommended minimum drained weight of canned sweetpotatoes. As an interim measure while further studies are made, AMS proposes to lower the recommended drained weight for sweetpotatoes packed in retail size cans, including No. 10 size cans, by two percent, and add the recommended drained weight criteria for the No. 300 can.

The No. 300 size can was not included in the last revision of the grades standard, but is being added because of the increased usage of this can size. The percentage water capacity, on which the recommended minimum drained weight averages are based, is calculated by dividing the RMDWA by the total water capacity of the container. The drained weight of the No. 300 can is based on the percentage water capacity available in the No. 303 can, which is very similar in size. As the canning industry has been replacing production of the No. 303 container size with the No. 300 can, it seems appropriate to include the RMDWA for

No. 300 cans along with the other drained weight changes in the standard.

A 60-day comment period is provided for interested persons to comment on changes to the standards.

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Dated: January 9, 1998.

**Robert C. Keeney,**

*Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### **Authorizing BLM To Offer Oil and Gas Leases in Management Areas 21, 45, 71, 72; Bridger-Teton National Forest; Teton, Sublette and Fremont Counties, Wyoming**

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA—Lead Agency; Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Cooperating Agency.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to prepare Environmental Impact Statement.

**SUMMARY:** The Bridger-Teton National Forest will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to document the analysis and disclose the environmental impacts of the proposed authorization of the BLM to offer oil and gas leases in Management Areas 21, 45, 71, and 72.

The 1990 Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan identified all of Management Areas 21, 45, 71, and 72 as available for oil and gas leasing. The Forest Plan did not make the leasing decision for site specific lands. Therefore, because the Forest Plan made no site-specific decisions, the Forest Plan did not make an irreversible commitment of resources. The next step in the leasing process is to complete a site specific analysis of the Management Areas. The oil and gas leasing analysis is tied to the oil and gas analysis contained within the Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement and analyzes resource issues at a smaller scale and incorporates any new resource information. The purpose of offering Management Areas 21, 45, 71, and 72 is to provide opportunities for exploration and development of leasable minerals. A specific objective of the 1990 Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan is to "Provide leasable, locatable, and salable mineral exploration and development opportunities" (see Goal and objective 1.1 (d) page 113 Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and

<sup>1</sup> Source—USDA, NASS, ASB