
Agricultural Marketing Service—Its Programs and Services

Information staff, Agricultural Marketing Service

For 75 years USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has been providing a vast array of marketing programs, marketing services, and regulatory functions to U.S. agriculture. AMS assists in the complex process of moving food and fiber products from producer to consumer. Its programs and services promote an efficient, effective, and equitable agricultural marketing system.

AMS Marketing Programs

Food Purchasing

AMS purchases food for distribution to schools, institutions, and other eligible outlets by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. They include perishable products in temporary surplus and foods that specifically help schools meet nutritional requirements of the program. Food customarily purchased by AMS includes meat and meat products, poultry and poultry products, egg products, fish, and processed and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Government Food Quality Assurance Program

AMS has developed uniform and simplified specifications, such as Commercial Item Descriptions, to allow the needs of many Federal agencies to be met by current food industry production practices. User agencies include military installations, Veterans' Administration hospitals, schools, correctional institutions, and other Federal foodservice programs.

Grade Standards

AMS maintains grade standards for cotton, dairy products, fruits, beef, veal, calf, lamb, pork, mohair, poultry, rabbits, shell eggs, tobacco, vegetables, and wool. The standards describe the entire range of quality for each product and are the basis for the quality grades.

AMS Marketing Services

Grading and Acceptance Services

Grading services for the products mentioned under "Grade Standards" are available on request for a fee paid by the users.

Grading provides buyers and sellers with an impartial appraisal of the quality of the commodities being sold, and assists farmers in receiving fair prices for their products.

Market News Service

Market news reporters gather data by visits to trading points and by telephone on qualities and quantities of products sold, prices paid, demand, movement, and trends. AMS uses satellite communication, earth stations, and microcomputers to disseminate 700 to 900 market news messages and reports daily, which are made available to the agricultural industry as well as the print and electronic news media. Automatic telephone recordings also are employed to provide current market information. Market news services are operated cooperatively with State Departments of Agriculture.

Market Research and Development

AMS researchers explore new techniques and methods for improving marketing, including handling, processing, packaging, storage, and distribution of agricultural products. Researchers also work with local governments and food industry groups to identify existing problems, to design improved facilities, and to assist in the development of modern, efficient wholesale food distribution centers and farmers' markets. AMS supports marketing studies at the State level through a matching funds grant program.

AMS Regulatory Functions

Commodity Research and Promotion Programs

Commodity research and promotion programs enable farmers to solve production and marketing problems; finance their own coordinated programs of research; create producer and consumer education; and develop promotion programs to improve, maintain, and develop markets for their commodities. Research and promotion programs have been authorized by Congress for beef, cotton, dairy products, eggs, floral products, honey, lamb, mohair, pork, potatoes, watermelon, and wool. AMS monitors the activities of all Federal research and promotion programs; most programs are administered by boards appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Fair Trade Practices

Assurance of dependable supplies, reasonable prices, and protection against unfair business practices is important to producers, marketers, and consumers alike. To promote fair play in marketing, AMS administers four major regulatory laws: the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA), the Federal Seed Act, the Plant Variety Protection Act, and the Agricultural Fair Practices Act.

Marketing Agreements and Orders

Marketing agreements and orders are designed to help stabilize markets for a number of farm commodities, chiefly milk, fruits, vegetables, and certain specialty crops like nuts, raisins, and dates. These programs are initiated and designed by farmers and administered by AMS. A marketing order may be issued by the Secretary of Agriculture only after public hearings, and after producers vote at least two-thirds approval through a referendum.

Egg Products Inspection and Shell Egg Surveillance

Mandatory inspection is continuous in all plants processing liquid, frozen, and dried egg products to ensure that products reaching the consumer are wholesome and unadulterated. The disposition of certain types of undergrade shell eggs that are potential health hazards is also controlled.

For Further Information

To obtain additional information on AMS marketing programs and services and to find out how to reach the office that can help you with these programs and services, contact AMS Information Staff, Room 3510-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456.