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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 920

[Docket No. FV00-920-1 FR]

Kiwifruit Grown in California; Temporary Suspension of Inspection and Pack Requirements

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This rule continues the temporary suspensions of inspection and pack requirements prescribed under the California kiwifruit marketing order (order). The order regulates the handling of kiwifruit grown in California and is administered locally by the Kiwifruit Administrative Committee (Committee). This rule continues, for the 2000-2001 season, the suspension of the requirement that fruit must be reinspected if it has not been shipped by specified dates, and also continues the suspension of the minimum net weight requirements for kiwifruit tray packs. Both suspensions are scheduled to expire at the end of the 1999-2000 season. These suspensions are expected to reduce handler packing costs, increase grower returns, and enable handlers to compete more effectively in the marketplace.

EFFECTIVE DATE: This final rule becomes effective August 1, 2000. The suspension of §§ 920.302 (a)(4)(iii), and 920.155 expires on July 31, 2001.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rose M. Aguayo, Marketing Specialist, California Marketing Field Office, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, 2202 Monterey Street, suite 102B, Fresno, California 93721; telephone: (559) 487-5901, Fax: (559) 487-5906; or George Kelhart, Technical Advisor, Marketing Order

Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456; telephone: (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-5698.

Small businesses may request information on complying with this regulation by contacting Jay Guerber, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, P.O. Box 96456, room 2525-S, Washington, DC 20090-6456; telephone: (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-5698, or E-mail Jay.Guerber@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This final rule is issued under Marketing Order No. 920, as amended (7 CFR part 920), regulating the handling of kiwifruit grown in California, hereinafter referred to as the "order." The order is effective under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, as amended (7 U.S.C. 601-674), hereinafter referred to as the "Act."

The Department of Agriculture (Department) is issuing this rule in conformance with Executive Order 12866.

This final rule was reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. This rule is not intended to have retroactive effect. This rule will not preempt any State or local laws, regulations, or policies, unless they present an irreconcilable conflict with this rule.

The Act provides that administrative proceedings must be exhausted before parties may file suit in court. Under section 608c(15)(A) of the Act, any handler subject to an order may file with the Secretary a petition stating that the order, any provision of the order, or any obligation imposed in connection with the order is not in accordance with law and request a modification of the order or to be exempted therefrom. A handler is afforded the opportunity for a hearing on the petition. After the hearing the Secretary would rule on the petition. The Act provides that the district court of the United States in any district in which the handler is an inhabitant, or has his or her principal place of business, has jurisdiction to review the Secretary's ruling on the petition, provided an action is filed not later than 20 days after the date of the entry of the ruling.

This final rule continues the temporary suspensions of inspection

and pack requirements prescribed under the order. This rule will continue, for the 2000-2001 season, the suspension of the requirement that fruit must be reinspected if it has not been shipped by specified dates, and the suspension of the minimum net weight requirements for kiwifruit tray packs. Both suspensions were scheduled to expire at the end of the 1999-2000 season (July 31, 2000). These suspensions are expected to reduce handler packing costs, increase grower returns, and enable handlers to compete more effectively in the marketplace. This rule was unanimously recommended by the Committee at its February 24, 2000, meeting and will be in effect through July 31, 2001.

Continued Suspension of Reinspection Requirement

Section 920.55 of the order requires that prior to handling any variety of California kiwifruit, such kiwifruit shall be inspected by the Federal or Federal-State Inspection Service (inspection service) and certified as meeting the applicable grade, size, quality, or maturity requirements in effect pursuant to § 920.52 or § 920.53.

Section 920.55(b) provides authority for the establishment, through the order's rules and regulations, of a period prior to shipment during which inspections must be performed.

Prior to its suspension for 1998-1999 season, § 920.155 of the order's rules and regulations specified that the certification of grade, size, quality, and maturity of kiwifruit pursuant to § 920.52 or § 920.53 during each fiscal year was valid until December 31 of such year or 21 days from the date of inspection, whichever is later. Any inspected kiwifruit shipped after the certification period lapsed was required to be reinspected and recertified before shipment.

Section 920.155 was suspended for the 1998-1999 season by a final rule published August 4, 1998 (63 FR 41390). The Committee recommended this suspension to lessen the expenses upon the many kiwifruit growers who had either lost money or merely recovered their production costs in recent years. It concluded that the cost of reinspecting kiwifruit was too high to justify requiring it in view of the limited benefit reinspection provided. The Committee also believed it was no longer necessary to have fruit

reinspected to provide consumers with a high quality product because storage and handling operations had improved in the industry.

During the 1998–1999 season, handlers voluntarily checked stored fruit prior to shipment to ensure that the condition of the fruit had not deteriorated. Suspension of the reinspection requirement enabled handlers to ship quality kiwifruit during the 1998–1999 season without the necessity for reinspection and recertification and the costs associated with such requirements. However, because the harvest started later than normal and more fruit was in-line inspected and shipped directly to buyers, less fruit was repacked and available for evaluation than anticipated.

Therefore, at its February 25, 1999, meeting, the Committee unanimously recommended suspending § 920.155 of the order for one more season. Section 920.155 was suspended for the 1999–2000 season by a final rule published on July 29, 1999 (64 FR 41010).

During the 1999–2000 season a severe frost reduced the crop size from the estimated 9 million tray equivalents to 6 million tray equivalents. A tray equivalent is equal to approximately 7 pounds of fruit. This significant crop reduction and the excellent quality of the fruit resulted in limited quantities of fruit remaining in cold storage for repacking and evaluation. The Committee wanted to fully evaluate the suspension of the reinspection requirement during a normal season. Therefore the Committee, at its February 24, 2000, meeting, unanimously recommended suspending § 920.155 for another season, the 2000–2001 season. This suspension will be in effect until July 31, 2001.

Continued Suspension of Minimum Net Weight Requirements for Trays

Under the terms of the order, fresh market shipments of kiwifruit grown in California are required to be inspected and meet grade, size, maturity, pack, and container requirements. Section 920.52 authorizes the establishment of minimum size, pack, and container requirements.

Section 920.302(a)(4) of the order's rules and regulations outlines pack requirements for fresh shipments of California kiwifruit.

Section 920.302(a)(4)(iii) specifies minimum net weight requirements for fruit of various sizes packed in containers with cell compartments, cardboard fillers, or molded trays.

Prior to the 1989–1990 season, there were no minimum tray weight

requirements although 73.5 percent of the crop was packed in trays. During the 1989–1990 season, minimum tray weights were mandated, as there were many new packers involved in the kiwifruit packing process and stricter regulations were viewed as necessary to provide uniform container weights for each size. However, since that season the proportion of the crop packed in trays has steadily declined.

During the 1997–1998 season, only 15.5 percent of the crop was packed into molded trays, and less than 1 percent of this fruit was rejected for failure to meet minimum tray weights. As a consequence, the Committee believed that minimum tray weight requirements might no longer be necessary to maintain uniformity in the marketplace.

Prior to the 1998–1999 season handlers were required to meet the minimum net weight requirements as shown in the following chart:

Count designation of fruit	Minimum net weight of fruit (pounds)
34 or larger	7.5
35 to 37	7.25
38 to 40	6.875
41 to 43	6.75
44 and smaller	6.5

The Committee met on July 8, 1998, and unanimously recommended suspension of the minimum net weight requirements for kiwifruit packed in cell compartments, cardboard fillers, or molded trays for the 1998–1999 season. Section 920.302(a)(4)(iii) was suspended for the 1998–1999 season by an interim final rule which was published September 3, 1998 (63 FR 14861) and finalized July 29, 1999 (64 FR 41019).

Even though the fruit was shorter, more full-bodied, and heavier during the 1998–1999 season, handlers were able to reduce packing costs and to compete more effectively in the market. The industry continued to pack well-filled trays without having to spend the extra time weighing them. There was no reduction in the uniform appearance of fruit packed into trays. The consensus of the industry was that the absence of tray weights had no impact during the 1998–1999 season due to the exceptionally heavy weight of the fruit.

The Committee, at its February 25, 1999, meeting unanimously recommended suspending the minimum net weight requirements for the 1999–2000 season to evaluate the suspended requirements during a season when the fruit shape and density were normal. This suspension was implemented by a

final rule published on July 29, 1999 (64 FR 41010) and will be in effect until July 31, 2000.

As previously mentioned, the 1999–2000 crop was approximately three million tray-equivalents shorter than estimated due to a severe frost during the spring of 1999. This shortage of fruit resulted in limited quantities of fruit available for evaluation. Because of the uncharacteristic fruit in the 1998–1999 season and the short crop in the 1999–2000 season, the Committee at its February 24, 2000, meeting, unanimously recommended continuing the suspension of § 920.302(a)(4)(iii) for another season, the 2000–2001 season. This suspension will be in effect until July 31, 2001, and is expected to result in reduced handler packing costs and increased grower returns, and to enable handlers to compete more effectively in the marketplace.

Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

Pursuant to requirements set forth in the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) considered the economic impact of this action on small entities. Accordingly, AMS prepared this final regulatory flexibility analysis.

The purpose of the RFA is to fit regulatory actions to the scale of business subject to such actions in order that small businesses will not be unduly or disproportionately burdened. Marketing orders issued pursuant to the Act, and the rules issued thereunder, are unique in that they are brought about through group action of essentially small entities acting on their own behalf. Thus, both statutes have small entity orientation and compatibility.

There are approximately 60 handlers of California kiwifruit subject to regulation under the marketing order and approximately 400 producers in the production area. Small agricultural producers are defined by the Small Business Administration (13 CFR 121.201) as those whose annual receipts are less than \$500,000, and small agricultural service firms are defined as those whose annual receipts are less than \$5,000,000. Fifty-nine handlers have annual receipts less than \$5,000,000, excluding receipts from other sources. Three hundred ninety producers have annual sales less than \$500,000, excluding receipts from any other sources. Therefore, a majority of the kiwifruit handlers and producers may be classified as small entities.

This rule continues the temporary suspensions of inspection and pack requirements prescribed under the order. This rule continues, for the 2000–2001 season, the suspension of the

requirement that fruit must be reinspected if it has not been shipped by specified dates, and the minimum net weight requirements for kiwifruit tray packs. Both suspensions were scheduled to expire at the end of the 1999–2000 season (July 31, 2000). Continuation of the suspensions is expected to reduce handler packing costs, increase grower returns, and enable handlers to compete more effectively in the marketplace. This rule was unanimously recommended by the Committee at its February 24, 2000, meeting and will be in effect through July 31, 2001.

Continued Suspension of Reinspection Requirement

Section 920.55 of the order requires that prior to handling any variety of California kiwifruit, such kiwifruit shall be inspected by the Federal or Federal-State Inspection Service (inspection service) and certified as meeting the applicable grade, size, quality, or maturity requirements in effect pursuant to § 920.52 or § 920.53.

Section 920.55(b) provides authority for the establishment, through the order's rules and regulations, of a period prior to shipment during which inspections must be performed.

Prior to its suspension for 1998–1999 season, § 920.155 of the order's rules and regulations specified that the certification of grade, size, quality, and maturity of kiwifruit pursuant to § 920.52 or § 920.53 during each fiscal year was valid until December 31 of such year or 21 days from the date of inspection, whichever is later. Any inspected kiwifruit shipped after the certification period lapsed was required to be reinspected and recertified before shipment.

Section 920.155 was suspended for the 1998–1999 season by a final rule published August 4, 1998 (63 FR 41390). The Committee recommended this suspension to lessen the expenses upon the many kiwifruit growers who had either lost money or merely recovered their production costs in recent years. It concluded that the cost of reinspecting kiwifruit was too high to justify requiring it in view of the limited benefit reinspection provided. The Committee also believed it was no longer necessary to have fruit reinspected to provide consumers with a high quality product because storage and handling operations had improved in the industry.

During the 1998–1999 season, handlers voluntarily checked stored fruit prior to shipment to ensure that the condition of the fruit had not deteriorated. Suspension of the

reinspection requirement enabled handlers to ship quality kiwifruit during the 1998–1999 season without the necessity for reinspection and recertification and the costs associated with such requirements. However, because the harvest started later than normal and more fruit was in-line inspected and shipped directly to buyers, less fruit was repacked and available for evaluation than anticipated.

Therefore, at its February 25, 1999, meeting, the Committee unanimously recommended suspending § 920.155 of the order for one more season. Section 920.155 was suspended for the 1999–2000 season by a final rule published on July 29, 1999 (64 FR 41010).

During the 1999–2000 season a severe frost reduced the crop size from the estimated 9 million tray equivalents to 6 million tray equivalents. A tray equivalent is equal to approximately 7 pounds of fruit. This significant crop reduction and the excellent quality of the fruit resulted in limited quantities of fruit remaining in cold storage for repacking and evaluation. The Committee wanted to fully evaluate the suspension of the reinspection requirement during a normal season. Therefore the Committee, at its February 24, 2000, meeting, unanimously recommended suspending § 920.155 for another season, the 2000–2001 season. This suspension will be in effect until July 31, 2001.

Continued Suspension of Minimum Net Weight Requirements for Trays

Under the terms of the order, fresh market shipments of kiwifruit grown in California are required to be inspected and meet grade, size, maturity, pack, and container requirements. Section 920.52 authorizes the establishment of minimum size, pack, and container requirements.

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Section 920.302(a)(4)(iii) specifies minimum net weight requirements for fruit of various sizes packed in containers with cell compartments, cardboard fillers, or molded trays.

Prior to the 1989–1990 season, there were no minimum tray weight requirements although 73.5 percent of the crop was packed in trays. During the 1989–1990 season, minimum tray weights were mandated, as there were many new packers involved in the kiwifruit packing process and stricter regulations were viewed as necessary to provide uniform container weights for each size. However, since that season

the proportion of the crop packed in trays has steadily declined.

During the 1997–1998 season, only 15.5 percent of the crop was packed into molded trays, and less than 1 percent of this fruit was rejected for failure to meet minimum tray weights. As a consequence, the Committee believed that minimum tray weight requirements might no longer be necessary to maintain uniformity in the marketplace.

Prior to the 1998–1999 season handlers were required to meet the minimum net weight requirements as shown in the following chart:

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The Committee met on July 8, 1998, and unanimously recommended suspension of the minimum net weight requirements for kiwifruit packed in cell compartments, cardboard fillers, or molded trays for the 1998–1999 season. Section 920.302(a)(4)(iii) was suspended for the 1998–1999 season by an interim final rule published September 3, 1998 (63 FR 14861).

Even though the fruit was shorter, more full-bodied, and heavier during the 1998–1999 season, handlers were able to reduce packing costs and to compete more effectively in the market. The industry continued to pack well-filled trays without having to spend the extra time weighing them. There was no reduction in the uniform appearance of fruit packed into trays. The consensus of the industry that season was that the absence of tray weights had no negative impact during the 1998–1999 season due to the exceptionally heavy weight of the fruit.

The Committee, at its February 25, 1999, meeting, unanimously recommended suspending the minimum net weight requirements for the 1999–2000 season in order to evaluate the suspended requirements during a season when the fruit shape and density were normal. This suspension was implemented by a final rule published on July 29, 1999 (64 FR 41010) and will be in effect until July 31, 2000.

As previously mentioned, the 1999–2000 crop was approximately three million tray-equivalents shorter than estimated due to a severe frost during the spring of 1999. This shortage of fruit resulted in limited quantities of fruit

available for evaluation. Because of the uncharacteristic fruit in the 1998–1999 season and the short crop in the 1999–2000 season the Committee wanted to suspend the minimum net weight requirement for another year of evaluation. Therefore, at its February 24, 2000, meeting, the Committee, once again, unanimously recommended continuing the suspension of § 920.302(a)(4)(iii) for another season, the 2000–2001 season. This suspension will be in effect until July 31, 2001, and is expected to reduce handler packing costs, increase grower returns, and enable handlers to compete more effectively in the marketplace.

These changes address the marketing and shipping needs of the kiwifruit industry and are in the interest of handlers, growers, buyers, and consumers. The impact of these changes is expected to be beneficial to all handlers and growers regardless of size.

The Committee discussed alternatives to this change, including indefinitely suspending these requirements. While the industry continues to believe that the suspensions have helped handlers reduce packing costs and compete more effectively in the marketplace, it is not yet ready to recommend permanent suspension for the 2000–2001 and future seasons. Both the 1998–1999 and 1999–2000 seasons were abnormal in some respects, and the Committee wanted to study the results of the suspensions during a normal season. Thus, the Committee unanimously agreed to suspend these requirements for the 2000–2001 season.

This rule relaxes inspection and pack requirements under the kiwifruit marketing order. Accordingly, this action will not impose any additional reporting or recordkeeping requirements on either small or large kiwifruit handlers. As with all Federal marketing order programs, reports and forms are periodically reviewed to reduce information requirements and duplication by industry and public sector agencies.

As noted in the initial regulatory flexibility analysis, the Department has not identified any relevant Federal rules that duplicate, overlap, or conflict with this final rule.

In addition, the Committee's meetings were widely publicized throughout the kiwifruit industry and all interested persons were invited to attend the meetings and participate in Committee deliberations. Like all Committee meetings, the February 24, 2000, meeting was a public meeting and all entities, both large and small, were able to express their views on this issue.

A proposed rule concerning this action was published in the **Federal Register** on April 24, 2000 (65 FR 21668). Copies of the rule were mailed or sent via facsimile to all Committee members and kiwifruit handlers. Finally, the rule was made available through the Internet by the Office of the Federal Register. A 30-day comment period ending May 24, 2000, was provided to allow interested persons to respond to the proposal. No comments were received.

A small business guide on complying with fruit, vegetable, and specialty crop marketing agreements and orders may be viewed at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>. Any questions about the compliance guide should be sent to Jay Guerber at the previously mentioned address in the **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section.

After consideration of all relevant matter presented, including the information and recommendation submitted by the Committee and other available information, it is hereby found that this rule, as hereinafter set forth, will tend to effectuate the declared policy of the Act.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 920

Kiwifruit, Marketing agreements, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, 7 CFR part 920 is amended as follows:

PART 920—KIWIFRUIT GROWN IN CALIFORNIA

1. The authority citation for 7 CFR part 920 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 601–674.

§ 920.155 [Suspended]

2. In part 920, § 920.155 is suspended in its entirety effective August 1, 2000, through July 31, 2001.

§ 920.302 [Suspended in part]

3. In § 920.302, paragraph (a)(4)(iii) is suspended effective August 1, 2000, through July 31, 2001.

Dated: June 8, 2000.

James R. Frazier,

Acting Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.

[FR Doc. 00–15015 Filed 6–13–00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–02–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

9 CFR Part 94

[Docket No. 98–095–3]

Pork and Pork Products from Mexico Transiting the United States

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: We are amending the regulations for the importation of animal products to allow fresh (chilled or frozen) pork and pork products from the Mexican States of Baja California Sur, Campeche, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, Quintana Roo, and Sinaloa to transit the United States, under certain conditions, for export to another country. We are taking this action because there has been no outbreak of hog cholera in any of these States since 1993, and we are confident that fresh (chilled or frozen) pork and pork products from each of the above States could transit the United States under seal with a negligible risk of introducing hog cholera.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 14, 2000.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Michael David, Senior Staff Veterinarian, Animals Program, National Center for Import and Export, VS, APHIS, 4700 River Road Unit 39, Riverdale, MD 20737; (301) 734–8364.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The regulations in 9 CFR part 94 (referred to below as the regulations) prohibit or restrict the importation of certain animals and animal products into the United States to prevent the introduction of certain animal diseases. Section 94.9 of the regulations prohibits the importation of pork and pork products into the United States from countries where hog cholera exists, unless the pork or pork products have been treated in one of several ways, all of which involve heating or curing and drying.

Because hog cholera exists in certain areas in Mexico, pork and pork products from most Mexican States must meet the requirements of § 94.9 to be imported into the United States. Section 94.20 provides an exception, allowing the importation of fresh (chilled or frozen) pork and pork products from the Mexican States of Sonora and Yucatan.

Under § 94.15, pork and pork products that are from certain Mexican States and that are not eligible for entry