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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 989

[Docket No. FV02-989-2 IFR]

Raisins Produced From Grapes Grown in California; Reduction in Production Cap for 2002 Diversion Program

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Interim final rule with request for comments.

SUMMARY: This rule reduces the production cap for the 2002 diversion program (RDP) for Natural (sun-dried) Seedless (NS) raisins from 2.75 to 2.0 tons per acre. The cap is specified under the Federal marketing order for California raisins (order). The order regulates the handling of raisins produced from grapes grown in California and is administered locally by the Raisin Administrative Committee (RAC). Under an RDP, producers receive certificates from the RAC for curtailing their production to reduce burdensome supplies. The certificates represent diverted tonnage. Producers sell the certificates to handlers who, in turn, redeem the certificates with the RAC for raisins from the prior year's reserve pool. The production cap limits the yield per acre that a producer can claim in an RDP. Reducing the cap for the 2002 RDP will bring the figure in line with 2001 crop yields.

DATES: Effective March 18, 2002. Comments received by April 1, 2002, will be considered prior to issuance of a final rule.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit written comments concerning this rule. Comments must be sent to the Docket Clerk, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW STOP 0237,

Washington, DC 20250-0237; Fax: (202) 720-5698, or e-mail:

moab.docketclerk@usda.gov. All comments should reference the docket number and the date and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register** and will be made available for public inspection in the Office of the Docket Clerk during regular business hours, or can be viewed at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Maureen T. Pello, Senior 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, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW STOP 0237, Washington, DC 20250-0237; 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, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW STOP 0237, Washington, DC 20250-0237; telephone: (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-5698, or e-mail: Jay.Guerber@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This rule is issued under Marketing Agreement and Order No. 989 (7 CFR part 989), both as amended, regulating the handling of raisins produced from grapes 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 (USDA) is issuing this rule in conformance with Executive Order 12866.

This rule has been 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, 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 USDA 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. Such handler is afforded the opportunity for a hearing on the petition. After the hearing USDA 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 USDA'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 rule reduces the production cap for the 2002 RDP for NS raisins from 2.75 to 2.0 tons per acre. The cap is specified in the order. Under an RDP, producers receive certificates from the RAC for curtailing their production to reduce burdensome supplies. The certificates represent diverted tonnage. Producers sell the certificates to handlers who, in turn, redeem the certificates with the RAC for raisins from the prior year's reserve pool. The production cap limits the yield per acre that a producer can claim in an RDP. Reducing the cap for the 2002 RDP will bring the figure in line with 2001 crop yields. This action was recommended by the RAC at a meeting on November 13, 2001.

Volume Regulation Provisions

The order provides authority for volume regulation designed to promote orderly marketing conditions, stabilize prices and supplies, and improve producer returns. When volume regulation is in effect, a certain percentage of the California raisin crop may be sold by handlers to any market (free tonnage) while the remaining percentage must be held by handlers in a reserve pool (reserve) for the account of the RAC. Reserve raisins are disposed of through various programs authorized under the order. For example, reserve raisins may be sold by the RAC to handlers for free use or to replace part of the free tonnage they exported; carried over as a hedge against a short crop the following year; or may be disposed of in other outlets not competitive with those for free tonnage raisins, such as government purchase,

distilleries, or animal feed. Net proceeds from sales of reserve raisins are ultimately distributed to producers.

Raisin Diversion Program

The RDP is another program concerning reserve raisins authorized under the order and may be used as a means for controlling overproduction. Authority for the program is provided in § 989.56 of the order, and additional procedures are specified in § 989.156 of the order's administrative rules and regulations.

Pursuant to these sections, the RAC must meet by November 30 each crop year to review raisin data, including information on production, supplies, market demand, and inventories. If the RAC determines that the available supply of raisins, including those in the reserve pool, exceeds projected market needs, it can decide to implement a diversion program, and announce the amount of tonnage eligible for diversion during the subsequent crop year. Producers who wish to participate in the RDP must submit an application to the RAC. Such producers curtail their production by vine removal or some other means established by the RAC and receive a certificate from the RAC which represents the quantity of raisins diverted. Producers sell these certificates to handlers who pay producers for the free tonnage applicable to the diversion certificate minus the established harvest cost for the diverted tonnage. Handlers redeem the certificates by presenting them to the RAC and paying an amount equal to the established harvest cost plus payment for receiving, storing, fumigating, handling, and inspecting the tonnage represented on the certificate. The RAC then gives the handler raisins from the prior year's reserve pool in an amount equal to the tonnage represented on the diversion certificate. The new crop year's volume regulation percentages are applied to the diversion tonnage acquired by the handler (as if the handler had bought raisins directly a producer).

Production Cap

Section 989.56(a) of the order specifies a production cap of 2.75 tons per acre for any production unit of a producer approved for participation in an RDP. The RAC may recommend, subject to approval by USDA, reducing the 2.75 tons per acre production cap. The production cap limits the yield that a producer can claim. Producers who historically produce yields above the production cap can choose to produce a crop rather than participate in the

diversion program. No producer is required to participate in an RDP.

Pursuant to § 989.156, producers who wish to participate in a program must submit an application to the RAC by December 20. Producers must specify, among other things, the raisin production and the acreage covered by the application. RAC staff verifies producers production claims using handler acquisition reports and other available information. However, a producer could misrepresent production by claiming that some raisins produced on one ranch were produced on another, and use an inflated yield on the RDP application. Thus, the production cap limits the amount of raisins for which a producer participating in an RDP may be credited, and protects the program from overstated yields.

RAC Recommendation

The RAC met on November 13, 2001, and recommended reducing the production cap from 2.75 to 2.0 tons per acre. With 2001 raisin-type variety grape production down by 31 percent, according to the California Agricultural Statistics Service, the RAC recommended reducing the production cap by about 30 percent to reflect 2001 crop yields. Paragraph (t) in § 989.156 of the order's rules and regulations is revised accordingly.

On November 28, 2001, the RAC met and reviewed data relating to the quantity of reserve raisins and anticipated market needs. With a 2001–02 NS crop estimated at 359,341 tons, and a computed trade demand (comparable to market needs) of 235,850 tons, the RAC projects a reserve pool of 123,491 tons of NS raisins. With such a large anticipated reserve, the RAC announced that 45,182 tons of NS raisins would be eligible for diversion under the 2002 RDP. Of the 45,182 tons, 40,182 tons will be made available to approved producers who submitted applications to the RAC by December 20, 2001, with producers who plan to remove vines receiving priority over those who plan to curtail (abort) production through spur pruning or other means. Section 989.156(d) requires the RAC to give priority to applicants who agree to remove vines. Another 5,000 tons will be made available to approved producers who submit applications to the RAC from December 21, 2001, through May 1, 2002, and plan to remove vines. Authority for this additional opportunity for vine removal is provided in § 989.156(s).

Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

Pursuant to requirements set forth in the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has considered the economic impact of this action on small entities. Accordingly, AMS has prepared this initial 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 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 20 handlers of California raisins who are subject to regulation under the order and approximately 4,500 raisin producers in the regulated area. Small agricultural firms are defined by the Small Business Administration (13 CFR 121.201) as those having annual receipts of less than \$5,000,000, and small agricultural producers are defined as those having annual receipts of less than \$750,000. Thirteen of the 20 handlers subject to regulation have annual sales estimated to be at least \$5,000,000, and the remaining 7 handlers have sales less than \$5,000,000. No more than 7 handlers, and a majority of producers, of California raisins may be classified as small entities.

This rule revises § 989.156(t) of the order's rules and regulations regarding the RDP. Under an RDP, producers receive certificates from the RAC for curtailing their production to reduce burdensome supplies. The certificates represent diverted tonnage. Producers sell the certificates to handlers who, in turn, redeem the certificates with the RAC for raisins from the prior year's reserve pool. The order specifies a production cap limiting the yield per acre that a producer can claim in an RDP. This rule reduces the cap from 2.75 to 2.0 tons per acre to accurately reflect 2001 crop yields. Authority for this action is provided in § 989.56(a) of the order.

Regarding the impact of this action on affected entities, producers who participate in the 2002 RDP will have the opportunity to earn some income for not harvesting a 2002–03 crop. Producers will sell the certificates to handlers next fall and be paid for the free tonnage applicable to the diversion certificate minus the harvest cost for the diverted tonnage. Applicable harvest

costs for the 2002 RDP were established by the RAC at \$340 per ton.

Reducing the production cap will have little impact on raisin handlers. Handlers will pay producers for the free tonnage applicable to the diversion certificate minus the \$340 per ton harvest cost. Handlers will redeem the certificates for 2001–02 crop NS reserve raisins and pay the RAC the \$340 per ton harvest cost plus payment for bins (\$20 per ton) and for receiving, storing, fumigating, handling (currently totaling \$46 per ton), and inspecting (currently \$9.00 per ton) the tonnage represented on the certificate. Reducing the production cap will have little impact on handler payments for reserve raisins under the 2001 RDP.

Alternatives to the recommended action include leaving the production cap at 2.75 tons per acre or reducing it to another figure besides 2.0 tons per acre. However, the majority of RAC members believe that a cap of 2.0 tons per acre more accurately reflects 2001 yields.

There was some discussion at the RAC's meeting that the 2.0-ton per acre production cap was too low and would discriminate against producers with high yields. In recent years, cultural practices have evolved to where some producers' yield per acre is reportedly as high as 4 tons. However, as previously stated, the program is voluntary and producers whose vines can produce 4 tons per acre have the option to produce a raisin crop rather than apply for the RDP and be subject to the production cap.

This rule imposes no additional reporting or recordkeeping requirements on either small or large raisin handlers. In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the information collection requirement referred to in this rule (i.e., the application) has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under OMB Control No. 0581–0178. 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. Finally, USDA has not identified any relevant Federal rules that duplicate, overlap, or conflict with this rule.

Further, the RAC's meeting on November 13, 2001, the RAC's Administrative Issues Subcommittee meeting on that same day but prior to the RAC meeting where this action was deliberated, and the RAC's meeting on November 28, 2001, where a diversion program was announced, were all public meetings widely publicized

throughout the raisin industry. All interested persons were invited to attend the meetings and participate in the industry's deliberations. Finally, all interested persons are invited to submit information on the regulatory and information impact of this action on small businesses.

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.

A 15-day comment period is provided to allow interested persons to respond to this rule. A 15-day comment period is deemed appropriate because producer applications were due to the RAC by December 20, 2001, and therefore the 2.0 tons per acre production cap should be in place as soon as possible.

After consideration of all relevant material presented, including the information and recommendation submitted by the RAC 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.

Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553, it is also found and determined upon good cause that it is impracticable, unnecessary, and contrary to the public interest to give preliminary notice prior to putting this rule into effect, and that good cause exists for not postponing the effective date of this rule until 30 days after publication in the **Federal Register** because: (1) The submission deadline for producer applications for the 2002 RDP was December 20, 2001; (2) producers are aware of this action which was recommended by the RAC at a public meeting; (3) the program is voluntary, and any producer can choose to produce a raisin crop for delivery in 2002; and (4) this interim final rule provides a 15-day comment period for written comments and all comments timely received will be considered prior to finalization of this rule.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 989

Grapes, Marketing agreements, Raisins, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, 7 CFR part 989 is amended as follows:

PART 989 — RAISINS PRODUCED FROM GRAPES GROWN IN CALIFORNIA

1. The authority citation for 7 CFR part 989 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 601–674.

2. In § 989.156, paragraph (t) is revised to read as follows:

§ 989.156 Raisin diversion program.

* * * * *

(t) Pursuant to § 989.56(a), the production cap for the 2002 raisin diversion program for the Natural (sun-dried) Seedless varietal type is 2.0 tons of raisins per acre.

Dated: March 11, 2002.

A.J. Yates,

Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service.

[FR Doc. 02–6143 Filed 3–14–02; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–02–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

9 CFR Parts 91 and 161

[Docket No. 99–053–2]

Origin Health Certificates for Livestock Exported From the United States

AGENCY: Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: We are amending the regulations pertaining to animal exports and the standards for accredited veterinarians to allow origin health certificates for animals intended for export from the United States to be valid for more than 30 days in some cases, depending on the testing requirements of the country of destination. This change will align our requirements for export origin health certificates with the testing requirements of importing countries. This action will eliminate the need for exporters to obtain another certificate when animals arrive at the port of embarkation after more than 30 days have elapsed, thereby reducing costs and delays for U.S. livestock exporters who ship animals to certain countries. This change will not increase the risk of infected or exposed animals being exported, since all animals are inspected an additional time before leaving the United States.

EFFECTIVE DATE: April 1, 2002.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Bob Bokma, Coordinator, Americas Region, National Center for Import and