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USDA ESTABLISHES REGULATIONS FOR FRUIT MOVEMENT FROM FLORIDA

WASHINGTON, Aug. 1, 2006--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service is amending its requirements for the movement of fresh fruit from Florida to prevent the spread of citrus canker. The interim rule becomes effective upon publication.

USDA's decision to regulate fruit movement from the state of Florida provides a mechanism for healthy Florida citrus fruit to be sold to noncitrus-producing states (45 states total). This scientifically sound option provides the greatest level of certainty to safeguard other citrus-producing states from the introduction of citrus canker, while preserving Florida's fresh fruit citrus trade.

USDA considered a range of options for regulating fruit movement from Florida, but decided the state-wide regulation of Florida citrus would allow producers access to the U.S. market while minimizing the probability of spreading citrus canker to other citrus-producing states.

If citrus canker were to be detected in another citrus-producing state, this interim rule provides the framework to establish an appropriate regulatory response based on the nature of the outbreak. In addition, the interim rule allows for fresh fruit that would not otherwise be eligible for interstate movement to be delivered to a port for immediate export if the shipment meets the entry conditions of the importing country.

On Jan. 10, it was determined that a series of hurricanes beginning in 2004 spread citrus canker so extensively that eradication was no longer scientifically sound or logistically possible. As a result, USDA modified the established eradication program to stop the practice of destroying trees within 1,900 feet of an infected tree and to eliminate the compensation provision.

In February, USDA announced a new science-based approach to managing citrus canker that focuses on maintaining the health of Florida's citrus while acknowledging that eradication is no longer possible. The goal of the new citrus health response program is to establish accepted standards to propagate, produce, harvest, process and ship healthy Florida citrus. This approach was developed through a thorough process involving close partnerships with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as well as with federal and state scientists and industry experts. The decision to regulate the movement of Florida citrus is in keeping with this new approach.

While citrus canker affects the outward appearance of the fruit so that it may not be sold on the fresh market, the fruit may be used in the processing sector to make juice. Ninety percent of all Florida citrus and approximately 95 percent of orange production in the state is targeted for

the processing sector.

The benefits of protecting other citrus-producing states and preventing the spread of citrus canker outweigh expected costs associated with this regulatory action. This interim rule is scheduled for publication in the Aug. 8 *Federal Register* and becomes effective Aug. 1.

Consideration will be given to comments received on or before Oct. 2. Send an original and three copies of postal mail or commercial delivery comments to Docket No. APHIS-2006-0114 Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. If you wish to submit a comment using the Internet, go to the Federal eRulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov> and, in the "Search Regulations and Federal Actions" box, select "Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service" from the agency drop down menu; then click on "Submit." In the Docket ID column, select APHIS- 2006-0114 to submit or view public comments and to view supporting and related materials available electronically.

Comments are posted on the Regulations.gov Web site and may also be reviewed at USDA, Room 1141, South Building, 14th St. and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C., between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. To facilitate entry into the comment reading room, please call (202) 690 2817.

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