



Agricultural Marketing Service

[Doc. No. AMS-SC-25-0520]

United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Asparagus

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice and request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) is proposing to revise the United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Asparagus by updating and defining new style requirements related to percent head material for the “cut spears or cuts and tips” style of frozen asparagus. In addition, AMS proposes to change the definition of a head when it applies to the “cut spears or cuts and tips” style. These changes would align the grade standards with modern harvesting practices and provide guidance for the effective utilization of this commodity.

DATES: Comments must be submitted on or before [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit comments by mail to the Standardization Branch, Specialty Crops Inspection Division, Specialty Crops Program, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Training and Development Center; 100 Riverside Parkway, Suite 101, Fredericksburg, Virginia 22406; by fax at (540) 361-1199; or via the Internet at <https://www.regulations.gov>. Comments should reference the docket number and the date and page numbers of this issue of the *Federal Register*. All comments submitted in response to this notice will become a part of the public record and be made available to the public, including any personal information submitted with your comment, at <https://www.regulations.gov>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Andrew Buss at the address above or by phone at (231) 260-5913, or fax at (540) 361-1199, or email at

andrew.buss@usda.gov. Copies of the proposed United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Asparagus are available at <https://www.regulations.gov>. Copies of the current United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Asparagus are available at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/grades-standards/frozen-asparagus-grades-and-standards>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Section 203(c) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (7 U.S.C. 1622(c)), as amended, directs and authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture “[t]o develop and improve standards of quality, condition, quantity, grade, and packaging, and recommend and demonstrate such standards in order to encourage uniformity and consistency in commercial practices.” 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 Fruits and Vegetables no longer appear in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) but are maintained by USDA, AMS, Specialty Crops Program at the following web site: <https://www.ams.usda.gov>. AMS also makes copies of official standards available upon request. AMS is proposing revisions to the United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Asparagus using the procedures that appear in part 36 of title 7 of the CFR (7 CFR part 36).

Background

On August 25, 2025, AMS received a petition from the Michigan Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Association, Inc. (MACMA), an organization that represents asparagus and apple members in Michigan. The petitioners represent nearly 100 percent of the frozen asparagus growers, processors, and producers in the United States. In their petition, MACMA expressed a desire to change style requirements for head material and indicated the requested changes are due to the rising costs of labor, which result in less frequent picking of fields, longer asparagus spears, and ultimately decreased head material (when cut) due to the increase in length of the stalk. AMS worked closely with MACMA throughout the development of the proposed revisions, soliciting their

comments and suggestions about the standards through discussion drafts, phone calls, and email communications. These revisions seek to align the standards with current industry practices.

AMS is proposing three revisions to the United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Asparagus. First, AMS proposes to change the style requirements for the “cut spears or cuts and tips” style so that there is only one requirement for average head material. Currently, section 52.383(c) has two categories depending on the length of cut. AMS proposes to remove the two categories and establish a single new average percent head material requirement for “cut spears or cuts and tips” style for all cuts one-half inch to 2 inches in length: “Cut spears or cuts and tips style consists of the head and portions of the shoot cut transversely into units 2 inches or less but not less than one-half inch in length. To be considered of this style, head material of not less than 15 percent (average), by count, of all cuts shall be present.”

Second, in line with the first change, AMS is proposing to change the lot acceptance for percent head material in the style of “cut spears or cuts and tips” so that there is only one requirement for individual sample percent head material. Currently, section 52.392 has two categories depending on the length of cut. AMS proposes to remove the two categories and establish a single new individual sample requirement for lot acceptance of percent head material in the style of cut spears: “The percent, by count, of heads is determined by averaging the percentage of heads in all of the sample units comprising the sample, Provided, that no individual sample unit may contain less than 8 percent, by count, of heads.”

Lastly, AMS proposes to change the definition of a head in section 52.384(d)(2) from “An upper portion of a shoot which possesses a substantial amount of compact head material” to “An upper portion of a shoot which possesses at least one-half inch of compact head material.”

The proposed revisions to the grade standards would help ease the hardships currently faced by asparagus growers and better reflect the current marketing of frozen asparagus in the “cut spears or cuts and tips” style.

A 60-day period is provided for interested persons to submit comments on the proposed grade standards. Copies of the proposed revised standards are available on the internet at <https://www.regulations.gov>. After the 60-day comment period, AMS would proceed in accordance with 7 CFR 36.3(a)(1-3).

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

Erin Morris.

Administrator,

Agricultural Marketing Service.

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