



## **Agricultural Marketing Service**

**[Document Number AMS-SC-25-0586]**

### **United States Standards for Grades of Nectarines**

**AGENCY:** Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the Department of Agriculture (USDA) proposes to revise the United States (U.S.) Standards for Grades of Nectarines. AMS is proposing to remove “speckling”, as a type of defect when grading nectarines, since speckling is strictly a cosmetic issue and does not affect the internal quality, shelf life, or lead to any negative flavors of the affected nectarines. In fact, nectarines with higher sugar content, or sweetness, have been correlated with increased amounts of speckling. These changes would bring the grade standards in line with the present quality levels being marketed today and would provide guidance in 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 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; fax: (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 without change, including any personal information submitted with your comment, at <https://www.regulations.gov>.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Andrew Buss, at the address above, by phone (231) 260-5913; fax (540) 361-1199; or email at [andrew.buss@usda.gov](mailto:andrew.buss@usda.gov).

Copies of the proposed U.S. Standards for Grades of Nectarines are available at <http://www.regulations.gov>. Copies of the current U.S. Standards for Grades of Nectarines are available at <https://www.ams.usda.gov/grades-standards/fruits>.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** Section 203(c) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (7 U.S.C. 1621-1627), as amended, directs and authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture “to 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 and makes copies of official standards available upon request. The U.S. Standards for Grades of Fruits and Vegetables that no longer appear in the Code of Federal Regulations are maintained by USDA, AMS, Specialty Crops Program at the following web site: <http://www.ams.usda.gov>. AMS is proposing revisions to the U.S. Standards for Grades of Nectarines using the procedures that appear in part 36 of Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations (7 CFR part 36).

## **Background**

On August 29, 2025, AMS received a petition from the California Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), a voluntary, nonprofit agricultural trade association that advocates on behalf of its members within the California fresh fruit industry. CFFA consists of more than 300 members, which include growers, shippers, and marketers of several different types of fruit. The petitioners represent over 95 percent of the producers of nectarines. AMS has worked closely with CFFA throughout the development of the proposed revisions, soliciting their comments and suggesting about the standards through discussion drafts and presentations.

AMS is proposing to revise the U.S. Standards for Grades of Nectarines by removing speckling as a type of defect affecting the quality of nectarines from sections § 51.3156 Injury (§ 51.3156(h)(2)), § 51.3157 Damage (§ 51.3157(g)(3)), and § 51.3159 Serious Damage (§ 51.3159(h)(2)). Under these sections in the current standards, any nectarines which possess speckling on more than 50 percent of the surface can be scored as a defect. Speckling is the occurrence of numerous yellow spots densely concentrated and distinctly contrasting with the surface of a dark red colored fruit. The designation of speckling as a defect under the current standards has had a negative impact on California growers due to the fruit being rejected due to speckling, despite meeting all other quality and safety standards. A letter dated July 22, 2023, to Family Tree Farms from Dr. Ioannis S. Minas, Associate Professor of Pomology at the Department of Horticulture & Landscape Architecture at Colorado State University was included with CFFA’s petition. This letter describes nectarine skin speckling as a natural characteristic of nectarines in which scientific evidence shows fruit with higher sugar content (an indicator of sweetness) is correlated with higher amounts of speckling on the skin of the nectarine. This condition does not affect the internal quality, shelf life, or lead to any negative flavors of the fruit. With recent developments in breeding as a means to prioritize flavor, it would be expected that speckling would increase along with any new varieties of nectarines with higher sugar content (Brix). The proposed revisions to the grade standards to remove speckling as a defect will better reflect the current and foreseen future marketing of nectarines as consumer preferences are favoring fruit with higher sugar content.

The following reflects AMS’s proposed revisions to the definition section of the U.S. Standards for Grades of Nectarines:

<b>Section</b>	<b>Current Text</b>	<b>Proposed Text</b>
51.3156(h)(2) Injury	Fairly smooth or smooth russetting or staining when the area exceeds 10 percent	Fairly smooth or smooth russetting or staining when

	of the fruit surface: <b>Provided</b> , That speckling characteristic of certain varieties shall not be considered as russeting or discoloration.	the area exceeds 10 percent of the fruit surface.
51.3157(g)(3) Damage	Fairly smooth or smooth russeting when the area exceeds 15 percent of the fruit surface: <b>Provided</b> , That discoloration occurring as yellow to brown staining of the skin shall not be considered as russeting and shall be considered as causing damage only when materially detracting from the appearance of the nectarine, and that speckling characteristic of certain varieties shall not be considered as russeting or discoloration.	Fairly smooth or smooth russeting when the area exceeds 15 percent of the fruit surface: <b>Provided</b> , That discoloration occurring as yellow to brown staining of the skin shall not be considered as russeting and shall be considered as causing damage only when materially detracting from the appearance of the nectarine.
51.3159(h)(2) Serious Damage	Fairly smooth or smooth russeting when the area exceeds 50 percent of the fruit surface: <b>Provided</b> , That discoloration occurring as yellow to brown staining of the skin shall not be considered russeting and shall be considered as causing serious damage only when seriously detracting from the appearance of the nectarine, and that speckling characteristic of certain varieties shall not be considered as russeting or discoloration.	Fairly smooth or smooth russeting when the area exceeds 50 percent of the fruit surface: <b>Provided</b> , That discoloration occurring as yellow to brown staining of the skin shall not be considered russeting and shall be considered as causing serious damage only when seriously detracting from the appearance of the nectarine.

A 60-day period is provided for interested persons to submit comments on the proposed revisions to the grade standards. Copies of the proposed revised standards are available on the internet at <http://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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