



Governmentwide Food Quality Assurance

Fruit and Vegetable Programs

Government Food Specifications

When the yearly grocery bill adds up to \$5 billion, as it does for the food service programs for the Federal Government's hospitals, military installations, schools, correctional institutions, etc., there is more to shopping than just going to the market. This huge food-buying operation involves researching, writing, and coordinating hundreds of specifications and running a complex quality assurance program, all to ensure that the food products produced by the seller meet the requirements of the buyer--in this case, the Federal, State, and local governments and other interested parties.

Background

Until 1979, each government agency that bought food managed its own food specifications. This produced a maze of overlapping, inconsistent, and complex specifications that discouraged food producers from bidding on government contracts. To bring order, clarity, and consistency to U.S. Government food purchases, the Governmentwide Food Quality Assurance Program was begun. Since 1988, the reorganized Food Quality Assurance Staff within the Agricultural Marketing Service's Fruit and Vegetable Programs has been managing this complex program.

The Program

The goal of the Governmentwide Food Quality Assurance Program is to make sure that the Federal Government buys its food as efficiently and economically as possible and to make sure it takes advantage of the innovations and efficiencies of the commercial marketplace. Increasingly, these benefits are also being sought by State and local government agencies that buy food.

The Food Quality Assurance Staff manages the governmentwide development, revision, coordination, review, approval, cancellation, and evaluation of Commercial Item Descriptions (CIDs) for food. CIDs are simple specifications that designate prominent characteristics of the product, processors' conformance guarantees, and other requirements. They can be accessed on the Internet at www.ams.usda.gov/fqa/cids.htm.

In cooperation with the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency and Food and Nutrition Service, as well as other Federal and State Government agencies, the Food Quality Assurance Staff determines if a document needs to be developed or revised, establishes time frames to accomplish these objectives, and oversees the process from start to finish. The staff also maintains a central file of all food specifications used by the Federal Government.

Fruit and Vegetable Programs

Prior to document approval, the Food Quality Assurance Staff reviews CIDs to ensure that document requirements conform to applicable laws, regulations, and policies. After document approval, the Food Quality Assurance Staff arranges for document indexing, printing, and distribution. Once the document has been used by Federal and State agencies, the staff monitors contractual data to determine use, nonuse, or changes in requirements of approved documents. Because of its central role in U.S. Government food specifications, the Food Quality Assurance Staff often is the initial contact point for both government and industry inquiries regarding CIDs and quality assurance practices and procedures.

Information

The Food Quality Assurance Staff publishes the **Governmentwide Food Quality Assurance Program Interagency Functional Directory**, which is a “Who’s Who” for Federal food activities. Copies of this directory and additional information regarding the program are available from the Food Quality Assurance Staff, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 2506-S, Stop Code 0243, Washington, DC 20250-0243. Telephone: (202) 720-9939. FAX: (202) 690-0102. Internet: www.ams.usda.gov/fv/fvqual.htm.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Revised May 1998