

# Produce Industry News

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## A Window into Your AMS, Fruit and Vegetable Programs By Robert C. Keeney



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**M**arket forces are driving changes in the produce industry that are causing us, like you, to change the way we do business.

Our goal in publishing *Produce Industry News* is to open a window into our program so that we can tell you about some of the innovative ways we are responding to your changing needs and those of the produce industry as a whole.

With its roots in the

early 1900s, AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs has a long and proud history of serving the needs of the U.S. fruit and vegetable industry, domestically and abroad.

Today, AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs consists of more than 1,200 employees, as well as our state partners, located nationwide who service the U.S. fresh and processed produce industry.

AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs has worked closely with all segments of the industry to design and implement solutions to address the challenges of buying and selling a highly perishable commodity. The inspection and grading services, as well as the regulatory and self-help programs, among others, have evolved as solutions to particular industry challenges.

Some of the programs we

administer are mandated by law, such as the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA), but many of the other services we offer are either voluntary, fee-for-service, or industry requested self-help efforts.

Whether we are administering a federal regulation, or providing a voluntary service, we strive to respond to your requests for support in the same way your customers demand it: rapidly and with creativity and flexibility.

About four times per year, you will receive *Produce Industry News* via mail and e-mail, and it will be posted to our Web site. Throughout this and subsequent issues, you will be meeting just a few of our dedicated staff. Please feel free to reach out to any of us with questions and comments about issues of importance to you.

### Inside this issue:

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**We want to hear from you.** What topics would you like to see covered in future editions of the newsletter? Are there questions you can't find answers to on our Web site? Send your questions and suggestions to [FVInfo@ams.usda.gov](mailto:FVInfo@ams.usda.gov).

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## Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement By Michael Durando



**Michael Durando** is Chief of the Marketing Order Administration Branch. He can be reached at (202) 720-2491 or michael.durando@ams.usda.gov



The process of developing and implementing a nationwide leafy greens marketing agreement will be fully transparent.

AMS expects to conduct public hearings in 2009 on a proposed nationwide leafy greens marketing agreement. These hearings, which will allow for public input on the details of the proposed federal program, are contingent upon a recommendation to be submitted to AMS by a team of produce industry representatives who are now drafting the framework for the marketing agreement. This program would help

minimize the chance of unsafe lettuce, spinach, cabbage, greens, and related products from reaching consumers, and is similar to programs now operating in Arizona and California.

The process of developing and implementing a nationwide leafy greens marketing agreement will be fully transparent. The industry team will conduct outreach activities to gauge industry-wide support, while USDA, when the time

comes, will gather further public comment and evidence during the formal hearing process.

This USDA-authorized marketing agreement would reinforce leafy green marketers' abilities to meet food safety and sanitation requirements, and thus reduce the risk of product contamination. However, the program would not replace or supersede the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's authority.

Applying marketing agreements to address the produce industry's auditing and sanitation needs is a new venture at USDA and is creating interest among other commodity groups, besides the leafy greens industry. Marketing agreements, along with similar marketing orders, are flexible enough to be tailored to the particular needs of growers, handlers and other marketers of fruits and vegetables.

Please feel free to contact me with your questions.

## Market News Introduces Expansion to *National Fruit and Vegetable Retail Report* By Terry Long



**Terry Long** is Chief of the Market News Branch. He can be reached at (202) 720-2745 or terry.long@ams.usda.gov

Since 1915, the Fruit and Vegetable Market News Service has been providing reliable, timely, and unbiased shipping point and wholesale market information.

Market News routinely looks to improve its service and expand market coverage in response to trends in the industry and requests from customers. The most recent expansion in market coverage adds an entirely new level of trading to the offerings of

market reports. In October 2007, Market News began tracking and reporting advertised specials at the retail level on fresh fruit and vegetables with the release of the weekly report, *National Fruit and Vegetable Retail Report*.

In October 2008, Market News expanded the retail report by adding in year-ago comparisons each week on a national basis for the regularly reported items. Additionally, Market News

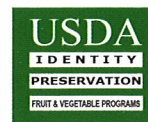
added a national snapshot of advertised prices for organically grown produce, including a description of the product and the corresponding price range.

*National Fruit and Vegetable Retail Report* is available free to the public and can be accessed online at [www.marketnews.ams.usda.gov/portal/fv](http://www.marketnews.ams.usda.gov/portal/fv). For questions about this report or other market information, please feel free to contact me.



# Innovations to Meet Unique Industry Needs— Identity Preservation Program

By Leanne Skelton



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**F**ruit and Vegetable Programs is offering a new and exciting service to the produce industry, the Identity Preservation (IP) Program. Produce marketers that have developed unique varieties of fruit or vegetables can use the IP Program to ensure their products stand out in the market. Whether it is a new variety of grapes or an old heirloom vegetable variety,

the IP Program may make the difference in establishing a market for unique produce items.

The IP Program is a voluntary service that provides sellers with independent, unbiased verification of the identification, segregation, and traceability of a company's unique or value-added product by USDA personnel.

When USDA's IP program logo is applied to your packaging, promotional materials and your company's Web site, customers can buy with confidence in the knowledge that they are receiving truly unique products.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions regarding the benefits of the IP Program.

# PACA—Much More than the “Produce Police”

By Lorenzo Tribbett



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industry promoting interstate and foreign commerce through dispute resolution, mediation, arbitration, licensing, and outreach programs facilitating fair trade practices.

A great way to steer clear of problems for your fruit and vegetable business is to know your rights and responsibilities under PACA, but also to reach out and talk to one of our experts when you need us.

In 2006, the PACA Branch underwent a restructuring to bring our costs in line with revenue-generated licensing fees. Although we closed several offices, we committed to the industry that there would be little impact on service. Through process improvements, we have been able to significantly enhance your ability to access information about PACA, such as how you need it

and when you need it. For example:

### **National Call Center.**

To provide rapid access to a PACA specialist, our PACA “Good Delivery” toll-free hotline (800) 495-7222 is staffed Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. EST.

**Online Access.** PACA's Web site provides 24/7 access to valuable tools when you need them, such as a free online PACA training program.

Additionally, informing industry about PACA through educational sessions and other outreach is critical to encouraging the use of fair trade practices. Our staff offers PACA-related training and educational sessions delivered around the country. Last year, PACA specialists made more than 60 presentations nationwide, including conducting

seminars at produce terminal markets such as Atlanta, Philadelphia, and New York City. We can provide training at your place of business as well, or in conjunction with other industry events. Take a look at what we offer on [www.ams.usda.gov/paca](http://www.ams.usda.gov/paca).

We are continuously enhancing the ways that you can access PACA information and our staff, both online and via the phone. By being there when you need us, PACA helps address challenges you face daily in your business.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions. We look forward to continuing to be much more than the “Produce Police.” We are your “Partners in Produce.”

**T**he branch that oversees the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) is often viewed as the “Produce Police” because of the belief that all we do is enforce PACA regulations. Enforcement is indeed an important function, but only a part of the story. Here is a deeper look into how PACA serves you.

PACA proactively works for the fruit and vegetable



## Do You Recognize These Shields and Logos?

If so, you are probably participating in one of AMS's leading-edge quality assurance programs.

We can help you publicize your participation by providing logo and shield art work and printed material, such as brochures and fact sheets, to fully explain the program benefits to your customers. We can also produce placards to display at your place of business or while exhibiting your products at a trade show.

Please contact Christopher Purdy at (202) 720-3209 or [christopher.purdy@ams.usda.gov](mailto:christopher.purdy@ams.usda.gov) for additional details about the marketing tools available or to find out what these programs can do for you.

Serving the produce industry since the early 1900s, AMS Fruit and Vegetable Programs' fee-for-service offerings are delivered via a network of trained and experienced staff. Our clients include growers, shippers, brokers, receivers, distributors, processors, retailers and restaurants, among others.

### Our services include:

- Audit-based programs
- Inspection and grading
- Establishment of U.S. grade standards
- Industry training
- Quality systems and process auditing
- "Market News"
- Self-help marketing programs
- Commodity purchases
- International representation

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