

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL MARKETING SERVICE
FRUIT AND VEGETABLE DIVISION
PROCESSED PRODUCTS STANDARDIZATION AND INSPECTION BRANCH
WASHINGTON, D. C.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR INSPECTION

of

FROZEN SWEET PEPPERS

FOR USE OF USDA PROCESSED FOODS INSPECTORS

NOVEMBER, 1956

ACTION BY: All Employees Of The Branch

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FILE UNDER: FROZEN SWEET PEPPERS

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INSPECTORS' INSTRUCTIONS
FOR
FROZEN SWEET PEPPERS

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INSPECTORS' INSTRUCTIONS
FOR
FROZEN SWEET PEPPERS

November - 1956

I GENERAL

A Purpose and Scope.

The instructions contained herein explain and furnish technical information which will serve as a guide in the inspection of frozen sweet peppers and aid inspectors in attaining uniformity in applying the United States Standards and in proper certification of the product. These instructions also serve to familiarize inspectors with the commercial production of frozen sweet peppers and the general procedure used by the industry.

B Caution.

Inspectors are reminded that these are administrative instructions for their use only and not for public distribution.

C Keep Instructions Current.

These instructions may be revised, in whole or in part, whenever the need for such revisions is indicated. Therefore, any comments or suggestions such as the detection of errors or the development of new and better inspection techniques should be forwarded in detail to the Washington office.

II PRODUCTION

A Annual Pack.

Frozen sweet peppers are a relatively new item in the frozen food field. The annual pack has increased each year as the product becomes better known and more widely distributed. It has been estimated that the annual pack amounts to approximately one million pounds.

II PRODUCTION (Continued)

B Areas of Production.

Considerable acreage is devoted to the production of sweet peppers for processing in the Middle Atlantic States, chiefly Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey. Other producing areas are in the States of California and Washington.

C Varieties.

The variety of sweet peppers most preferred by processors in the Bell type or larger growing varieties, such as World Beater and various strains of California Wonder. Both varieties are largely four lobed; short oblong with little or no taper; very attractive, smooth, uniform, and deep green changing to bright crimson; flesh very thick, sweet and mild.

D Harvesting.

Sweet peppers are harvested in the late summer and early fall months of the year. The peppers are picked by hand and delivered to the freezing plant in field boxes, bushel hampers, or bushel baskets. The peppers are trucked to the freezing plants for processing soon after harvesting.

E Raw Material for Processing.

The raw material delivered to the plants may be graded by Federal or State Inspectors. However, most sweet peppers delivered are not graded and the packers decide the price to be paid on the basis of quality requirements of their own. Most processors buy sweet peppers that are not less than 2-1/2 inches in diameter and length. Green and red peppers are kept entirely separate in the purchase of the raw material.

III PREPARATION AND FREEZING

A Preparation for Freezing.

- 1 Cleaning and Washing. Generally the sweet peppers, after reaching the processing plant, are emptied from hampers onto a belt conveyor and moved to either a squirrel cage washer or a bath type washer to remove soil particles adhering to

III PREPARATION AND FREEZING (Continued)

A Preparation for Freezing. (Cont'd)

1 Cleaning and Washing.

the surface of the peppers. In some instances, a preliminary sorting of the peppers is done prior to its entry into the washer in order to remove badly cracked, soft or decayed pods; also, those pods that are not well colored.

2 Coring and Trimming.

After washing, the pods are cored and trimmed. The core of the pod is removed by the use of automatic coring machines or by hand. In the operation of the automatic coring machines the pods are placed, one at a time, on a conveyor under the coring device. After coring, the pods are trimmed by hand to remove blemishes, and may be washed several times to remove any loose seeds. Some processors pack a whole unstemmed style where only the long stem of the pod is removed.

3 Blanching.

Sweet peppers are not generally blanched, since blanching tends to separate the skin of the pepper from the flesh of the pod.

4 Sorting.

After trimming, the pods are then conveyed to inspection tables or on sorting belts where the pods are sorted according to their acceptability for the various styles of pack. The more uniform in size, color, and wholesomeness are separated for whole and halved styles while the remainder is diced or sliced. Off-colored pods, damaged pods, and other defects are removed at the same time.

5 Packaging and Freezing.

The pepper pods are then conveyed by belt, buckets, or crates to packaging tables where the whole and halved styles are packed by hand into various sized wax treated cartons that

III PREPARATION AND FREEZING (Continued)

A Preparation for Freezing. (Cont'd)

5 Packaging and Freezing.

are wrapped with an air-moisture resistant paper or other material. Sliced and diced styles are usually filled into containers by means of a mechanical filler. The cartons are placed on freezing trays and immediately trucked or conveyed to freezing units or tunnels. It is important that the product be frozen quickly after packing.

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT

A Sampling.

The sampling rates prescribed in the regulations and the procedure outlined in other Inspectors' Instructions and memorandums should be followed for frozen sweet peppers. The minimum rate of sampling prescribed in the Rules and Regulations should be increased when quality is doubtful or possibly irregular between the various samples. Pertinent information with respect to the product should be recorded at time of sampling on the sampling certificate, such as condition of the container, storage temperature, or any condition which is unusual and might reflect on the quality or condition of the product.

B Minimum Equipment and Inspection Material.

The following list comprises the items needed for the inspection of frozen sweet peppers:

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Continued)

B Minimum Equipment and Inspection Material. (Cont'd)

- (1) Scale and pan.
- (2) Trays - white, shallow laboratory trays for 16-ounce containers and smaller.
- (3) Trays - white, deep, large size laboratory trays for 2-1/2 pounds or larger containers.
- (4) United States standard - applicable issue.
- (5) Commodity handbook instructions and any supplemental instructions on the product or related subjects.
- (6) Inspection papers (such as identification of lots, applicant, contract instructions).
- (7) Score sheets.

C General Inspection Procedure.

The United States Standards for Grades of Frozen Sweet Peppers describe and establish requirements for the quality factors as accurately as it has been possible to do. In order to uniformly apply the standards, however, it is necessary for each inspector to be guided by his supervisor when there is any doubt as to the correct interpretation of any requirement. This is particularly important whenever unusual conditions are encountered or when an error in the interpretation of a requirement will change the product from one grade to another. Quality requirements which involve judgment as to the extent to which the appearance and eating quality are affected should always be checked with your supervisor, unless you are sure you are applying the proper interpretation. Supervisors should make sure their judgment is in line with their District Supervisor and the Washington office.

The usual information as outlined in the General Inspectors' Instructions should be recorded on the score sheet. Be sure to include pertinent information about the container, such as the size and kind of container, label, and any packer's code numbers or marks that are present.

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Continued)

D Net Weight.

The net weight of the product means the weight of the sweet peppers, exclusive of the container and wrappers. The net weight of each sample must be determined and recorded on the score sheet.

E Drained Weight.

Occasionally packages of frozen diced or sliced styles of sweet peppers contain excessive amounts of ice and ice crystals. If specifically requested a drained weight should be taken. If the drained weight has not been requested and the ice condition is definitely excessive, record a description of the ice in the package for reporting it on the certificate.

In making the drained weight determination, either of the following procedures may be used to thaw the product before proceeding with the drained weight determination:

- (1) ~~Completely thaw the frozen sweet peppers in the unopened package at room temperature; or~~
- (2) After removing all wrappings or packaging materials, place the frozen sweet peppers into a pliable bag, such as Cry-O-Vac, Pliofilm, or Polythylene. Evacuate the air from the bag, carefully tie or seal the bag, and completely thaw the frozen sweet peppers in a water bath held at temperatures of not more than 86 degrees F.

F Drained Weight Method.

The drained weight is determined by emptying the completely thawed sweet peppers upon a United States Standard No. 8 Circular Sieve of proper diameter containing eight meshes to the inch so as to distribute the product evenly, inclining the sieve slightly to facilitate drainage and allowing to drain for two minutes. At the end of one minute, the tilt of the sieve is reversed so as to release water which may be held on the small flange of the sieve. The drained weight is the weight of the sieve and the sweet peppers less the weight of the dry sieve.

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Continued)

F Drained Weight Method. (Cont'd)

A sieve eight inches in diameter is used for the equivalent of one-pound net weight packages or smaller, and a sieve 12 inches in diameter is used for packages larger than the equivalent of one-pound net weight.

G Thawing the Product.

Sweet peppers should be thawed by placing the frozen product on a tray and letting it stand until completely free from ice crystals. If the product is placed in sealed plastic bags, it may be thawed in water at a temperature not to exceed 86 degrees F. Attempts to separate frozen sweet peppers prior to their being completely thawed may result in damage to the product.

H Grade Factors Which Are Not Scored.

1 Similar Varietal Characteristics.

Sweet peppers for freezing are usually grown from seed stock pods selected by the processor during the packing season. The raw stock used may vary in color, size, and fleshiness as a result of favorable or adverse growing conditions. To meet this requirement the product must contain only pods of the sweet pepper plant.

2 Flavor.

The standards provide for a normal flavor which is a good characteristic normal flavor and odor free from objectionable flavors and odors of any kind. The flavor of frozen sweet peppers does not appear to be very greatly affected by the color of the product within the limits of color provided in the standards. A normal flavor and odor is a requirement in both Grade A and Grade B frozen sweet peppers.

~~If the frozen sweet peppers are spoiled or otherwise unfit to eat the product should be certified as: "Grade Not Certified."~~

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Continued)

I Grade Factors Which Are Scored.

1 Color.

a General.

The color should be determined immediately after the thawed product has been placed on the grading tray. As peppers approach maturity, the color gradually changes from green to a greenish brown, then to a light red, medium red and finally, when fully ripe, to a dark red color. Ripening of the flesh is irregular, however, and during the change from green to red a pepper may show green, greenish brown, and red areas on the surface.

b Green and Red Types.

To score in the (A) classification the overall color of the exterior surface of the pod must possess a sheen and be a characteristic bright color for the type, and variations from the predominating color does not materially affect the appearance. Predominating color is intended to mean approximately 90 percent of the surface area for whole or halved styles and approximately 90 percent, by weight, for sliced or diced style.

Similar provisions are applicable to U. S. Grade B, except that the variation from the predominating color must not exceed approximately 25 percent of the surface area for whole and halved styles or 25 percent, by weight, for sliced or diced style.

Markedly dull or off-colored frozen peppers should be scored in the Substandard classification.

c Mixed Type.

Normally, it is not the practice of processors to pack a mixed type of frozen peppers. However, due to the irregular ripening of the flesh on individual pods and the gradual change in color from green to dark red when fully ripe, it may become advantageous to pack a mixed

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Continued)

I. Grade Factors Which Are Scored. (Cont'd)

1 Color. (Continued)

c Mixed Type.

type instead of having an excessive separation for color. When it is found that frozen peppers do not meet the requirements for either green or red type, the overall color should be scored on the basis of the mixed type.

To score mixed type in the (A) classification the color of the exterior surface of the pods must possess a sheen and be characteristic of bright mixed colors. To score in the Grade (B) classification the exterior surface of the pepper may be slightly dull or lacking sheen. Frozen peppers which are dull or off color should be scored in the Substandard classification.

2 Uniformity of Size and Symmetry.

a Whole or Halved Style.

The typical shape of sweet peppers are usually three or four lobed; blocky; short oblong with little or no taper. However, to score in the Grade A classification the elongated pod is not to be considered too objectionable so long as the pod is not more than slightly dented and meets the prescribed size requirements of 2-1/2 inches in length and diameter. Pepper pods which are indented or curved in form but are not badly misshapen are to be classified as Grade B.

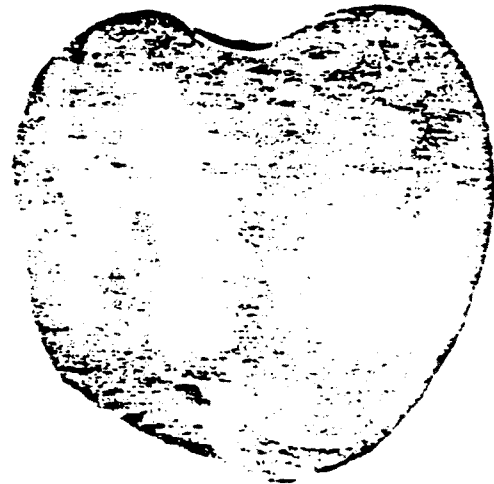
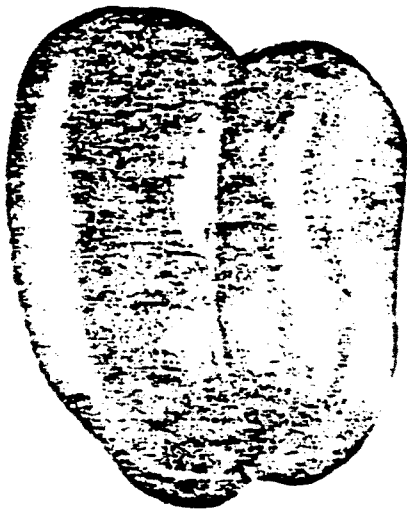
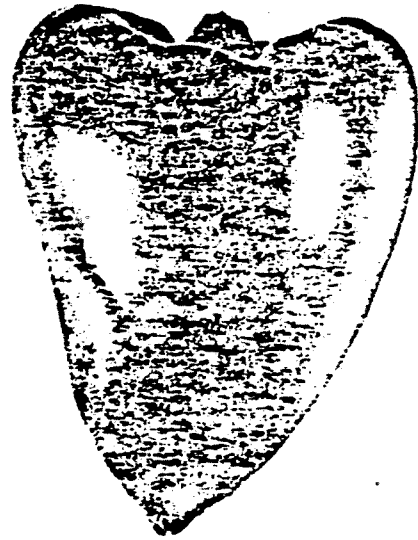
Pepper pods which fail to develop normally for some reason or other are commercially known as "Buttons," and are objectionable since very little flesh is left after the core and seeds are removed and are to be classified Substandard.

To assist the inspector in properly scoring uniformity of size and symmetry, the following illustrations show whole peppers which meet the different grade classifications for symmetry:

FROZEN SWEET PEPPERS

CLASSIFICATION FOR SYMMETRY

Whole Style



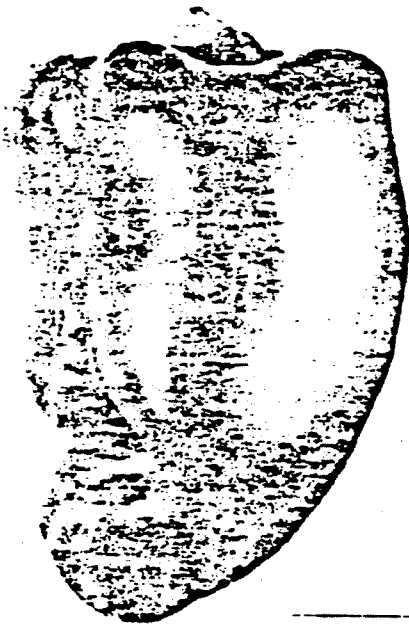
GRADE A CLASSIFICATION FOR SYMMETRY

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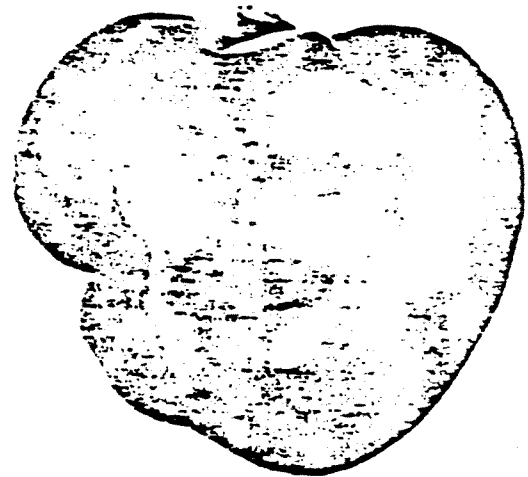
FROZEN SWEET PEPPERS

CLASSIFICATION FOR SYMMETRY

Whole Style



GRADE B CLASSIFICATION FOR SYMMETRY



SUBSTANDARD CLASSIFICATION FOR SYMMETRY

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Continued)

I Grade Factors Which Are Scored. (Cont'd)

2 Uniformity of Size and Symmetry. (Cont'd)

b Sliced; Diced.

Processors normally use excessively trimmed or irregular-sized and shaped pods for sliced or diced styles. Decidedly crooked, restricted, or otherwise seriously deformed pods should not be used since they cannot be diced or sliced properly into uniform pieces. In Grade A for sliced style the units should be practically uniform in size with not more than 30 percent, by weight, of all the units less than 1-1/4 inches in length. In Grade B the units are required only to be reasonably uniform in size with not more than 40 percent, by weight, of all the units less than 1-1/4 inches in length. All sliced peppers not meeting these requirements should be classified as Substandard.

Good judgment in handling sliced peppers should be used while separating the units for determining the percentage less than 1-1/4 inches. Inspectors should remember that they are handling a very crisp product and the percentage of short pieces can be exaggerated by undue handling.

Diced peppers are usually cut into squares measuring approximately 1/4 inch on each side. Frequently the thickness of the pod is less than 1/4 inch which results in a flat-square shape rather than a cube in which the three dimensions are the same measurement.

For Grade A diced style, the units are required to be practically uniform in size with no more than 10 percent, by weight, that are smaller than 1/2 the area of an average-sized unit and are markedly large and irregular shaped. In Grade B the units are required to be only reasonably uniform in size with not more than 20 percent, by weight, which are noticeably smaller than 1/2 the area of an average-sized unit and are markedly large and irregular shaped. All diced peppers not meeting these requirements should be classified as Substandard.

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Contd)

I Grade Factors Which Are Scored. (Contd)3 Defects.a Sand, Grit or Silt.

The presence of sand, grit, or silt is more likely to be due to an accident in the course of plant operations rather than carelessness in preparation of the product for freezing. However, examine the sample for visual evidence of sand, grit, or silt, as well as by organoleptic examination.

b Well Trimmed.

The unit is free from gouges or knife marks and with respect to whole unstemmed style that the stem is trimmed to not more than one-half inch length and with respect to whole stemmed and halved styles that the stem, core, seeds and placenta tissue are neatly removed so as to retain substantially the appearance of a whole or halved unit.

Irregularity in trimming is generally found at the stem end of whole stemmed or halved pods and may result from carelessness in removing the stem and seed pod when coring. Improper trimming may also be due to improperly adjusted coring machines. When the pods are small or have become excessively wilted prior to coring by automatic machinery, the pods may be crushed, torn, or accidentally cut through the sides of the pods.

c Reasonably Well Trimmed.

The unit is practically free from gouges or knife marks and with respect to whole unstemmed style that the stem is trimmed to not more than one-half inch length and with respect to whole stemmed and halved styles the stem, core, seeds and placenta tissue have been removed so as to retain to a reasonable extent the appearance of a whole or halved unit. The unit would not be excessively trimmed at the blossom end or stem end or on the sides of the pod. Such trimming should not seriously affect the appearance of the unit.

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Contd)

I Grade Factors Which Are Scored. (Contd)

3 Defects. (Contd)

d Seeds and Undeveloped Seeds.

When inspecting whole stemmed or halved units, the total number of seeds remaining in the pods together with loose seeds in the container should be recorded and the average calculated on the basis of the number of whole pods in the container. There is no set tolerance for the number of remaining seeds which may be found in an individual pod or unit. The seed in sliced or diced style is calculated on the basis of the net weight of the product in the container.

The following tolerances are suggested as a guide in scoring for seeds in all styles except whole unstemmed:

(1) Seeds.

Grade A - Not more than an average of 6 seeds, including loose seeds per pod or 10 ounces of net weight.

Grade B - Not more than an average of 10 seeds, including loose seeds per pod or 10 ounces of net weight.

e Core, Stem Material and Placenta Tissue.

Usually this material is completely removed when packing all styles of this product (except whole unstemmed style). This material when present should be scored on an appearance basis.

f Pitted or Perforated Units.

Areas of pods which may be affected by anthracnose or other types of rot or decay may be disintegrated during the process of washing. This may result in a pitted surface where the tissue affected has been washed away by the high pressure spray.

The following tolerances are suggested as a guide for the inspector in scoring pitted and perforated areas in the respective classifications:

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Continued)

I Grade Factors Which Are Scored. (Cont'd)

3 Defects. (Cont'd)

f Pitted or Perforated Units. (Continued)

(1) Pitted and Perforated Areas.

Grade A - Pitted and perforated areas aggregating not more than $1/4$ square inch ($1/2'' \times 1/2''$) per 10 ounces, net weight, of product, provided that the perforated area does not exceed $1/8$ square inch ($1/2'' \times 1/4''$).

Grade B - Pitted and perforated areas aggregating not more than $1/2$ square inch ($1/2'' \times 1''$) per 10 ounces, net weight, of product, provided that the perforated area does not exceed $1/4$ square inch ($1/2'' \times 1/2''$).

The overall appearance of the product should not be materially affected by pitting or perforations to score in the Grade A classification and should not be seriously affected to score in the Grade B classification.

g Internal and External Discoloration.

A dark or black discoloration may be found on the interior or exterior surface of the pod. Most often, when present, such discoloration will be found after the pod is opened, exposing the interior surface. The intensity of such discoloration and the area affected should be considered. When immature seed is found to be discolored it should be considered together with any other discoloration. No specific area tolerance is suggested for discoloration. The appearance or eating quality of the unit should not be materially or seriously affected by discoloration to score in the Grade A or Grade B classification, respectively.

There is no official established tolerance for anthracnose or other types of rot or decay. The standards require the product to be clean and sound within the limits of good commercial practice. In view of this, some administrative discretion must be exercised when decay or rot is encountered. Therefore, consult your supervisor before: Grade - Not certifying the product.

IV INSPECTION OF THE PRODUCT (Continued)

I Grade Factors Which Are Scored. (Cont'd)

3 Defects. (Cont'd)

h Split and Torn Units.

The appearance or eating quality of the peppers should not be affected by split or torn units for a score in the Grade A classification. To score in the Grade B classification, the unit should not be split or torn to the extent that the appearance or eating quality of the pod is materially affected.

Splits should not mutilate, disfigure, or alter the shape of the pod. Split or broken areas should not result in the loss of a piece or portion of the pod, and the pods should retain the appearance of wholeness.

4 Character.

In evaluating this factor, consideration is given to the fleshiness, firmness, and tenderness of the peppers and the peppers should also be examined for any evidence of shredding, sloughing, or disintegration of the tissue.

To score in the Grade A classification, the units should be firm, full fleshed, and tender without apparent disintegration. The pods should be of such texture that they may be handled while inspecting without tearing or breaking up.

A score in the Grade B classification should be given if the units show some evidence of disintegration.

When the units are soft or mushy, the factor of character should be scored in the Substandard classification. As this is a limiting factor, the product cannot be graded above Substandard regardless of the total score for the product.

7

CERTIFICATION

A General Instructions.

General instructions pertaining to certification of all processed food products are applicable to this product.

B Special Instructions.

1 Requests for Specific Certificate Information.

Certain purchasers of this product have set up specific requirements in their purchase specifications, sometimes based on the United States Standards. For example, such purchase specifications might require a Grade A product and also a minimum score of 28 points for defects.

Procedure. If specifically requested, show such special information in the body of the certificate as:

Defects score - 28 to 30 points.

The grade statement may also show compliance (or non-compliance) with specific purchase specifications in the manner outlined in general instructions on the subject of certification.

2 Adequacy of Blanch.

Results of the peroxidase or catalase test made at the request of applicant should be reported on the certificate as instructed in Inspectors' memorandums on the subject.

3 Mandatory Requirements.

In any case where the product is found to be adulterated or contain filthy material, it should be certified as "Grade not certified" and the reason stated.

VI INSPECTION DURING PACKING OPERATIONS

A Sanitation.

It is the duty of the inspector assigned to a plant to see that good standards of sanitation are maintained. There is a very rapid build up of scum on belts, flumes, and other parts of machinery, causing not only offensive odors in the plant but may cause off-odor, off-flavor, and spoilage in the product. These conditions can be controlled by careful periodic cleaning of all pieces of equipment.

B Operations.

Following are particular points to observe during the processing operation. They supplement general instructions or emphasize particular points to observe:

1 Raw Material.

- a Observe the condition of the peppers at the time they arrive at the plant.
- b The length of time the fresh product is held before processing should be noted.

Excessive wilting before processing should be avoided. Soft or wilted pods increase the difficulty in removing stems and cores in plants equipped with mechanical coring machines.

c Prevalence of defective peppers.

- (1) Presence of excessive dirt, sand, or silt.
- (2) Presence of damaged or bruised peppers.
- (3) Presence of rot, mold, and other decay.
- (4) Examine pods at stem end for infestation by corn-borer or other larvae.

VI INSPECTION DURING PACKING OPERATIONS (Continued)

B Operations. (Continued)

2- Preparation and Workmanship.

- a Check effectiveness of removing defective, dull or off-colored peppers.
- b Check effectiveness of washing process in removing dirt, silt, and loose extraneous material.
- c Check regarding any excessive mechanical damage to the raw product.
- d Observe operation of coring and trimming the pods. If coring is a hand operation, workers should be well trained and provided with proper equipment for the job. When pods are mechanically cored, observe operation of machine for proper adjustment.
- e The washing operation for removal of detached seed following coring should be thorough. Thorough washing will reduce to a minimum the number of seed which may remain in the pods following the coring operation.
- f Check thoroughness of draining so that excessive water will not go into containers.
- g The efficiency of the packaging operation should be observed. Also, check the declared fill of container.
- h It is important that peppers be frozen adequately and quickly as possible. Slow freezing or inadequate freezing may result in tissue damage, oxidation, fermentation, or organic growth. Inspectors, therefore, should check occasionally to see that peppers are not leaving the freezers before being adequately frozen.

VI INSPECTION DURING PACKING OPERATIONS (Continued)

C Recommendations.

When any abnormal or unsatisfactory condition is observed in either the sanitation, operation, or processing, it should be brought to the attention of the management through a proper, previously designated official. Written reports of unsatisfactory conditions should be made to the plant management whenever it appears necessary. Suggestions and carefully thought-out recommendations should be made for overcoming objectionable conditions and improving plant operations. The inspector should keep the supervisor informed and whenever serious problems arise, he should consult his supervisor for advice. The inspector must be alert, tactful, and diplomatic at all times. He must also keep in mind that he is assigned to render a helpful service and has no regulatory authority.