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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains notices to the public of the proposed issuance of rules and regulations. The purpose of these notices is to give interested persons an opportunity to participate in the rule making prior to the adoption of the final rules.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 925

[Docket No. FV02-925-1 PR]

Grapes Grown in a Designated Area of Southeastern California; Increased Assessment Rate

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: This rule would increase the assessment rate established for the California Desert Grape Administrative Committee (Committee) for the 2002 and subsequent fiscal periods from \$0.01 to \$0.015 per 18-pound lug of grapes handled. The Committee locally administers the marketing order which regulates the handling of grapes grown in a designated area of southeastern California. Authorization to assess grape handlers enables the Committee to incur expenses that are reasonable and necessary to administer the program. The fiscal period begins January 1 and ends December 31. The assessment rate would remain in effect indefinitely unless modified, suspended, or terminated.

DATES: Comments must be received by February 11, 2002.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit written comments concerning this rule. Comments must be sent to the Docket Clerk, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456; Fax: (202) 720-8938, or E-mail: moab.docketclerk@usda.gov. Comments should reference the docket number and the date and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register** and will be available for public inspection in the Office of the Docket Clerk during regular business hours, or can be viewed at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Rose Aguayo, Marketing Specialist or Kurt Kimmel, Regional Manager, California Marketing Field Office, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, 2202 Monterey Street, Suite 102B, Fresno, California 93721; telephone: (559) 487-5901, Fax: (559) 487-5906; or George Kelhart, Technical Advisor, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456; telephone: (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-8938.

Small businesses may request information on complying with this regulation by contacting Jay Guerber, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090-6456; telephone: (202) 720-2491, Fax: (202) 720-8938, or e-mail: Jay.Guerber@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This rule is issued under Marketing Agreement and Order No. 925, both as amended (7 CFR part 925), regulating the handling of grapes grown in a designated area of southeastern California, hereinafter referred to as the "order." The order is effective under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, as amended (7 U.S.C. 601-674), hereinafter referred to as the "Act."

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) is issuing this rule in conformance with Executive Order 12866.

This rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. Under the marketing order now in effect, California grape handlers are subject to assessments. Funds to administer the order are derived from such assessments. It is intended that the assessment rate as proposed herein would be applicable to all assessable grapes beginning on January 1, 2002, and continue until amended, suspended, or terminated. This rule will not preempt any State or local laws, regulations, or policies, unless they present an irreconcilable conflict with this rule.

The Act provides that administrative proceedings must be exhausted before parties may file suit in court. Under section 608c(15)(A) of the Act, any handler subject to an order may file with USDA a petition stating that the order, any provision of the order, or any

obligation imposed in connection with the order is not in accordance with law and request a modification of the order or to be exempted therefrom. Such handler is afforded the opportunity for a hearing on the petition. After the hearing USDA would rule on the petition. The Act provides that the district court of the United States in any district in which the handler is an inhabitant, or has his or her principal place of business, has jurisdiction to review USDA's ruling on the petition, provided an action is filed not later than 20 days after the date of the entry of the ruling.

This rule would increase the assessment rate established for the Committee for the 2002 and subsequent fiscal periods from \$0.01 to \$0.015 per 18-pound lug of grapes.

The grape marketing order provides authority for the Committee, with the approval of USDA, to formulate an annual budget of expenses and collect assessments from handlers to administer the program. The members of the Committee are producers and handlers of California grapes. They are familiar with the Committee's needs and with the costs for goods and services in their local area and are thus in a position to formulate an appropriate budget and assessment rate. The assessment rate is formulated and discussed in a public meeting. Thus, all directly affected persons have an opportunity to participate and provide input.

For the 1997 and subsequent fiscal periods, the Committee recommended, and USDA approved, an assessment rate that would continue in effect from fiscal period to fiscal period unless modified, suspended, or terminated by USDA upon recommendation and information submitted by the Committee or other information available to USDA.

The Committee met on November 5, 2001, and estimated a January 2002 beginning reserve of approximately \$124,800, and unanimously recommended expenditures of \$195,215 and an assessment rate of \$0.015 per 18-pound lug of grapes for the 2002 fiscal period. In comparison, last year's budgeted expenditures were \$186,023. The assessment rate of \$0.015 is \$0.005 higher than the rate currently in effect. The higher assessment rate is needed to offset increases in salaries and to keep the operating reserve at an adequate level.

The expenditures recommended by the Committee for the 2002 fiscal period include \$100,000 for research, \$28,200 for compliance activities, \$41,000 for salaries, and \$26,015 for other expenses. Budgeted expenses for these items in 2001 were \$100,000, \$35,200, \$15,000, and \$35,823, respectively.

The assessment rate recommended by the Committee was chosen because it will provide \$142,500 in assessment income (9.5 million lugs \times \$.015 per lug) and, when \$2,000 in interest income and \$50,715 of its reserves are used for approved expenses, allow the Committee to end the 2002 fiscal period with a \$74,085 reserve. The current rate of \$.01 per lug would only generate \$95,000 in assessment income, and require the Committee to use the \$2,000 in interest and \$98,215 of its reserves to cover its anticipated expenses. This would result in an ending reserve of \$26,585, which was not acceptable to the Committee. The December 2002 ending reserve funds (estimated to be \$74,085) with the new assessment rate would be kept within the maximum permitted by the order, approximately one fiscal period's expenses (\$ 925.42).

The proposed assessment rate would continue in effect indefinitely unless modified, suspended, or terminated by USDA upon recommendation and information submitted by the Committee or other available information.

Although this assessment rate would be in effect for an indefinite period, the Committee would continue to meet prior to or during each fiscal period to recommend a budget of expenses and consider recommendations for modification of the assessment rate. The dates and times of Committee meetings are available from the Committee or USDA. Committee meetings are open to the public and interested persons may express their views at these meetings. USDA would evaluate Committee recommendations and other available information to determine whether modification of the assessment rate is needed. Further rulemaking would be undertaken as necessary. The Committee's 2002 budget and those for subsequent fiscal periods would be reviewed and, as appropriate, approved by USDA.

Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

Pursuant to requirements set forth in the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has considered the economic impact of this rule on small entities. Accordingly, AMS has prepared this initial regulatory flexibility analysis.

The purpose of the RFA is to fit regulatory actions to the scale of business subject to such actions in order that small businesses will not be unduly or disproportionately burdened. Marketing orders issued pursuant to the Act, and the rules issued thereunder, are unique in that they are brought about through group action of essentially small entities acting on their own behalf. Thus, both statutes have small entity orientation and compatibility.

There are approximately 80 producers of grapes in the production area and approximately 26 handlers subject to regulation under the marketing order. Small agricultural producers are defined by the Small Business Administration (13 CFR 121.201) as those having annual receipts less than \$750,000, and small agricultural service firms are defined as those whose annual receipts are less than \$5,000,000.

Last year about 69 percent of the handlers could be considered small businesses under SBA's definition and about 31 percent could be considered large businesses. It is estimated that about 88 percent of the producers have annual receipts less than \$750,000. Therefore, the majority of handlers and producers of grapes may be classified as small entities.

This rule would increase the assessment rate established for the Committee and collected from handlers for the 2002 and subsequent fiscal periods from \$0.01 to \$0.015 per 18-pound lug of grapes. The Committee unanimously recommended expenditures of \$195,215 and an assessment rate of \$0.015 per 18-pound lug of grapes for the 2002 fiscal period. The proposed assessment rate of \$0.015 is \$0.005 higher than the 2001 rate. The volume of assessable grapes is estimated at 9.5 million 18-pound lugs. Thus, the \$0.015 rate should provide \$142,500 in assessment income. Income derived from handler assessments, along with interest income and funds from the Committee's authorized reserves should be adequate to cover budgeted expenses.

The expenditures recommended by the Committee for the 2002 fiscal period include \$100,000 for research, \$28,200 for compliance activities, \$41,000 for salaries, and \$26,015 for other expenses. Budgeted expenses for these items in 2001 were \$100,000, \$35,200, \$15,000, and \$35,823, respectively.

Prior to arriving at this budget, the Committee considered alternative expenditure levels, but ultimately decided that the recommended levels were reasonable to properly administer the order. The assessment rate recommended by the Committee was derived using the following formula:

Anticipated expenses (\$195,215), plus the desired 2002 ending reserve (\$74,085), minus the 2002 beginning reserve (\$124,800), minus the anticipated interest income (\$2,000), divided by the total estimated 2002 shipments (9.5 million 18-pound lugs). This calculation results in the \$0.015 assessment rate. This rate would provide sufficient funds in combination with interest and reserve funds to meet the anticipated expenses of \$195,215 and result in a December 2002 ending reserve of \$74,085, which is acceptable to the Committee. The December 2002 ending reserve funds (estimated to be \$74,085) would be kept within the maximum permitted by the order, approximately one fiscal period's expenses (\$ 925.41).

A review of historical information and preliminary information pertaining to the upcoming fiscal period indicates that the on-vine grower price for the 2002 season could range between \$5.00 and \$9.00 per 18-pound lug of grapes. Therefore, the estimated assessment revenue for the 2002 fiscal period as a percentage of total grower revenue could range between 0.2 and 0.3 percent.

This action would increase the assessment obligation imposed on handlers. While assessments impose some additional costs on handlers, the costs are minimal and uniform on all handlers. Some of the additional costs may be passed on to producers. However, these costs would be offset by the benefits derived by the operation of the marketing order.

In addition, the Committee's meeting was widely publicized throughout the grape production area and all interested persons were invited to attend the meeting and participate in Committee deliberations on all issues. Like all Committee meetings, the November 5, 2001, meeting was a public meeting and all entities, both large and small, were able to express views on this issue. Finally, interested persons are invited to submit information on the regulatory and informational impacts of this action on small businesses.

This proposed rule would impose no additional reporting or recordkeeping requirements on either small or large production area grape handlers. As with all Federal marketing order programs, reports and forms are periodically reviewed to reduce information requirements and duplication by industry and public sector agencies.

USDA has not identified any relevant Federal rules that duplicate, overlap, or conflict with this rule.

A small business guide on complying with fruit, vegetable, and specialty crop

marketing agreements and orders may be viewed at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>. Any questions about the compliance guide should be sent to Jay Guerber at the previously mentioned address in the **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT** section.

A 30-day comment period is provided to allow interested persons to respond to this proposed rule. Thirty days is deemed appropriate because: (1) The 2002 fiscal period begins on January 1, 2002, and the marketing order requires that the rate of assessment for each fiscal period apply to all assessable grapes handled during such fiscal period; (2) the Committee needs to have sufficient funds to pay its expenses which are incurred on a continuous basis; and (3) handlers are aware of this action which was unanimously recommended by the Committee at a public meeting and is similar to other assessment rate actions issued in past years.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 925

Grapes, Marketing agreements, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements.

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, 7 CFR part 925 is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 925—GRAPES GROWN IN A DESIGNATED AREA OF SOUTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA

1. The authority citation for 7 CFR part 925 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 601–674.

2. Section 925.215 is revised to read as follows:

§ 925.215 Assessment rate.

On and after January 1, 2002, an assessment rate of \$0.015 per lug is established for grapes grown in a designated area of southeastern California.

Dated: January 3, 2002.

A.J. Yates,

Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service.

[FR Doc. 02–576 Filed 1–9–02; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–02–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Part 959

[Docket No. FV02–959–1 PR]

Onions Grown in South Texas; Increased Assessment Rate

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service, USDA.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: This rule would increase the assessment rate established for the South Texas Onion Committee (Committee) for the 2001–02 and subsequent fiscal periods from \$0.03 to \$0.05 per 50-pound container or equivalent of onions handled. The Committee locally administers the marketing order which regulates the handling of onions grown in South Texas. Authorization to assess onion handlers enables the Committee to incur expenses that are reasonable and necessary to administer the program. The fiscal period begins August 1 and ends July 31. The assessment rate would remain in effect indefinitely unless modified, suspended, or terminated.

DATES: Comments must be received by February 11, 2002.

ADDRESSES: Interested persons are invited to submit written comments concerning this rule. Comments must be sent to the Docket Clerk, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525–S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090–6456; Fax: (202) 720–8938, or e-mail: moab.docketclerk@usda.gov. Comments should reference the docket number and the date and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register** and will be available for public inspection in the Office of the Docket Clerk during regular business hours, or can be viewed at: <http://www.ams.usda.gov/fv/moab.html>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Belinda G. Garza, Regional Manager, McAllen Marketing Field Office, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, 1313 E. Hackberry, McAllen, Texas 78501; telephone: (956) 682–2833, Fax: (956) 682–5942; or George Kelhart, Technical Advisor, Marketing Order Administration Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525–S, P.O. Box 96456; Washington, DC 20090–6456; telephone: (202) 720–2491, Fax: (202) 720–8938.

Small businesses may request information on complying with this regulation by contacting Jay Guerber, Marketing Order Administration

Branch, Fruit and Vegetable Programs, AMS, USDA, room 2525–S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, DC 20090–6456; telephone: (202) 720–2491, Fax: (202) 720–8938, or e-mail: Jay.Guerber@usda.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This rule is issued under Marketing Agreement No. 143 and Order No. 959, both as amended (7 CFR part 959), regulating the handling of onions grown in South Texas, hereinafter referred to as the “order.” The order is effective under the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, as amended (7 U.S.C. 601–674), hereinafter referred to as the “Act.”

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) is issuing this rule in conformance with Executive Order 12866.

This rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. Under the marketing order now in effect, South Texas onion handlers are subject to assessments. Funds to administer the order are derived from such assessments. It is intended that the assessment rate as proposed herein would be applicable to all assessable onions beginning on August 1, 2001, and continue until amended, suspended, or terminated. This rule will not preempt any State or local laws, regulations, or policies, unless they present an irreconcilable conflict with this rule.

The Act provides that administrative proceedings must be exhausted before parties may file suit in court. Under section 608c(15)(A) of the Act, any handler subject to an order may file with USDA a petition stating that the order, any provision of the order, or any obligation imposed in connection with the order is not in accordance with law and request a modification of the order or to be exempted therefrom. Such handler is afforded the opportunity for a hearing on the petition. After the hearing USDA would rule on the petition. The Act provides that the district court of the United States in any district in which the handler is an inhabitant, or has his or her principal place of business, has jurisdiction to review USDA’s ruling on the petition, provided an action is filed not later than 20 days after the date of the entry of the ruling.

This rule would increase the assessment rate established for the Committee for the 2001–02 and subsequent fiscal periods from \$0.03 to \$0.05 per 50-pound container or equivalent of onions.

The South Texas onion marketing order provides authority for the Committee, with the approval of USDA,