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THE FEDERAL-STATE INSPECTION SERVICE AND ITS ROLE IN THE FLORIDA AVOCADO AND LIME INDUSTRIES

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Florida avocados have been handled under a federal marketing order since 1954 and Florida limes since 1955. Each of these two fruits must meet certain requirements as to maturity, grade and pack prior to being offered for sale. These minimum requirements are determined by the Florida Avocado and Lime Administrative Committees subject to approval by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington. It is the responsibility of the Federal-State Inspection Service to determine that all these requirements have been met and then to certify to these facts.

The Federal-State Inspection Service was started in 1922 by an act of Congress giving the Secretary of Agriculture authority to organize federal-state inspection at the point of origin.

Since the beginning of terminal inspection in 1917 the feeling had been building up with growers and shippers that they were getting a "post mortem" service. This feeling developed because the growers and shippers did not find out about the grade of their product until it had been shipped to terminal market and a report sent back from the terminal market inspector. The bill that was passed by Congress set up guide lines and limitations as to what could and could not be done. Under these regulations the U.S. Department of Agriculture set up Federal-State inspection organizations in various states. These organizations were generally set up in cooperation with various state departments of agriculture.

When Congress extended inspection work to shipping point it did not appropriate additional funds for doing the work. This type of work is so wide spread that it would be virtually impossible for the federal government to assess and collect fees to do the work. It was generally mutually agreed that assessing and collecting fees would be the duty of the various states. The states hold these fees in trust funds and pay Federal-State inspectors salaries and expenses from these funds. Each state assesses fees and pays salaries according to what is considered fair and equitable for the local area.

At the present time there is an inspection force in 49 of the 50 states. Alaska does not have an inspection force since they do not produce enough of any product to ship out of state. There is also an inspection force in Puerto Rico and several groups along the Mexican border that inspect Mexican produce on the U.S. side of the border.

In recent years a Federal-State force of approximately 4,200 at the peak of the harvest season has been used. This figure will vary from time to time but is approximately correct.

The cooperative agreement, drawn up and agreed to by both federal and state

departments of agriculture, spells out the duties of each participating party.

It is generally agreed that the state department will assess and collect fees for services performed and pay salaries and expenses of inspection personnel from these funds. The state recruits prospective inspectors and brings them to training classes. Federal and state personnel assist with the training work. After classroom training state supervisors assign inspectors to duty stations in cooperation with the federal supervisor. On-the-job training continues under the direction of the local supervisor.

The Federal Department agrees to furnish such materials as U.S. grade standards, handbooks and visual aids. The federal department also furnishes a supervisor. Among his duties are responsibilities for training, licensing of inspectors after they are properly trained, checking uniformity of grade interpretation by inspectors, seeing that proper note keeping and certification procedures are being observed, and helping maintain good public relations with industry.

As a general rule Federal-State Inspectors do not assume any authority for enforcement at all. The Federal-State Inspection Service is a service unit. Their services are available and their personnel are available to make inspections upon request. The Federal-State Inspection Service is usually the inspection agency used by marketing agreement committees. This is not true mandatory inspection because Federal-State only does this kind of inspection upon request. To have a marketing agreement or order, the growers and shippers involved must vote to do so and Federal-State inspection only becomes involved when their services are requested.

The avocado industry in Florida has grown from a commercial production of 401,000 bushels for the 1954-55 season to 678,000 bushels for the 1970-71 season. During the 1955-56 season 448,000 bushels of limes were placed in the fresh market. This figure rose to 576,000 bushels for the 1970-71 season. Avocados and limes used for processing are not subject to any regulations and are not reflected in these figures.

These production figures might seem, rather small and insignificant when compared to those of a commodity such as citrus. Consider the fact however, that more than ninety percent of this production occurs in the south end of Dade County. When viewed in this perspective one can see why avocados and limes play such an important role in the economic life of this area.

Avocados and limes are generally inspected during the packing operation, although they may be inspected and certified to at any time prior to shipment or being offered for sale. Samples are chosen at random and the inspector must look at a sufficient number of samples to be sure that he is getting a representative view of the entire lot. Each lot is carefully checked to be sure that it meets the minimum requirements as to maturity, grade and pack. Any lot or portion thereof that is found to fall short of the minimum requirements must be repacked in a satisfactory manner before they can be certified as meeting the Secretary's Order.

The avocado maturity schedule issued by the Avocado Administrative Committee for the 1971-72 season lists fifty seven varieties. In addition all unnamed varieties are classified as West Indian Type or Guatemalan Type. Each variety or type is considered to be mature when the individual fruit has reached a given size or weight on a given

date. It behooves the inspector to be able to recognize each variety or type of avocado to enable himself in the determination of maturity.

Only one kind of lime, the seedless Persian Type is of commercial importance in Florida. This lime is considered mature when it has reached a given minimum size and minimum juice content. These requirements are determined by the Florida Lime Administrative Committee. The current regulation requires limes to be at least 1-7/8 inches minimum diameter and to have a minimum average of 42 percent juice by volume.

For grade determination in avocados the inspector looks for several defects. Different amounts of a given defect are permitted in different grades. Scarring, for instance, is one of the most common defects of avocados. The U.S. No. 1 grade allows 10 percent of the surface of the individual fruit to be affected by light brown fairly smooth scars. The U.S. No. 2 grade permits 25 percent of the surface to be affected and U.S. No. 3 grade 50 percent of the surface. Other defects to be considered in addition to scars include decay, anthracnose, cercospora spot, color, shape, cleanness, stems, cuts, scab, sunburn and sunscald.

When inspecting limes the inspector looks for decay, stylar-end breakdown, color, stems, scars, discoloration, thorn damage, cuts, skin breakdown and scale.

Pack regulations for avocados and limes are set up by the administrative committees. Only standard size containers with specified dimension may be used. All containers have requirements for minimum net weight and most have maximum net weight requirements. In addition the fruits must be of fairly uniform size and packed according to good commercial practice.

Avocados and limes from foreign countries are inspected at the port of entry. They are not subject to a pack regulation but must meet the same minimum grade and maturity requirements as Florida avocados and limes. When fruit are found that fail to meet these requirements the receiver has the option to recondition the fruit so that it does meet requirements or the fruit is destroyed.

Through the use of federal regulations and inspection the Florida avocado and lime industries assure themselves of keeping inferior fruit, both domestic and foreign, from the regular channels of trade and in the end a higher monetary return to the grower.

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