United States Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Marketing Service
Fruit and Vegetable Programs

Fresh Products Branch Directive

FPB 703
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Fresh Products Branch Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices (GAP&GHP) Audit Appeals, Complaints and Dispute Procedures

I. Purpose

To outline the management requirements of the Fresh Products Branch (FPB) appeals, complaints and dispute procedures for GAP&GHP audit programs.

II. Background

The AMS Industry Services Audit and Accreditation Programs (ISSAP) committee developed guidance documents for Audit Management Program procedures for AMS Branches that provide audit services. AMS Branch Audit Management Program (AMS 2) Section 7 outlines AMS Branch requirements to address appeals, complaints and disputes brought before the Branch by applicants or other parties.

III. Definitions

Appeal: A formal complaint contesting the results or findings of the audit brought before the Branch by applicants or other parties.

Complaints: Discontent or unhappiness about a situation, interpretation or performance of an audit, auditor(s) and/or policy brought before the Branch by applicants or other parties.

Dispute: Disagreement or argument about a situation, interpretation or performance of an audit, auditor(s) and/or policy brought before the Branch by applicants or other parties.

Audit Review Board: The Audit Review Board (ARB) shall consist of a minimum of 3 members as designated by the Branch Chief. Members must be FPB headquarters staff (including Federal Program Managers) that is an Audit Program evaluator in good standing.

IV. Policy

1. Application for Appeals

An appeal may only be requested by the original applicant and/or auditee. A formal request for an appeal must be in writing on company letterhead from the company or person requesting the appeal. The request shall include all necessary information including the date, location, and scopes addressed on the original audit being appealed, and the specific item(s) under dispute for the appeal request. Appeals must be submitted to ARB within 3 calendar days from the date the audit was performed.

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Ex. 108

Policy, Continued

2. Performance of Appeals

GAP&GHP audit appeals shall be performed by the ARB. The ARB will meet as needed to review all GAP&GHP audit appeals.

The ARB shall have the authority to sustain or reverse audits that are under appeal. The results of the appeal will be provided by the ARB to all parties in the appeal process within 14 calendar days of receipt of the request. A copy of the appeal results shall be made part of the audit record.

2. Complaints and Disputes

It is the responsibility of all licensed auditors to forward all complaints and disputes through the normal channels to the ARB for review. All complaints and disputes regarding GAP&GHP audits, auditor(s) and/or polices brought before the Branch by applicants or other parties shall be reviewed by the ARB.

3. Documentation

The Branch shall keep a record of all appeals, complaints, disputes and subsequent actions taken relative to GAP&GHP audits. Review and evaluation of effectiveness of all appeals, complaints, disputes and subsequent actions shall be performed on a regular basis.

for Cheryl Emery
Leanne L. Skelton
Branch Chief