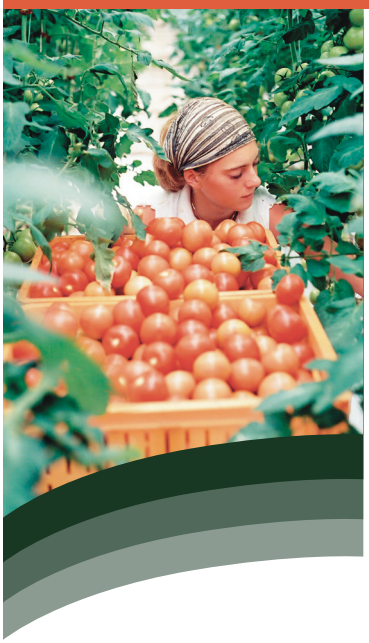
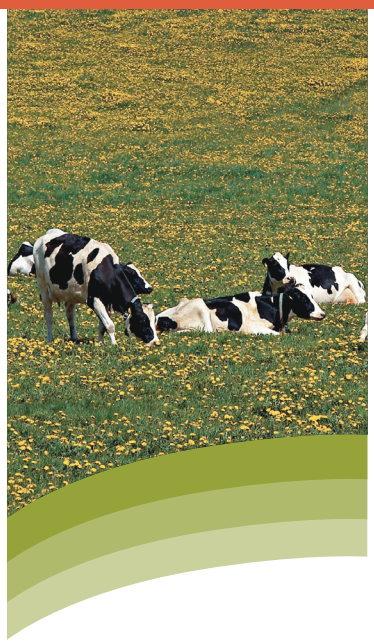
USDA United States Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Marketing Service

Creating Opportunities for American Farmers and Businesses





The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) provides the agriculture industry with valuable tools and services that help create marketing opportunities. AMS ensures the quality and availability of wholesome food and agricultural products for consumers in domestic and export markets.

American agriculture is extremely diverse and includes urban and rural operations of every size. It supports 1 in 12 U.S. jobs and provides safe, affordable food to consumers across the globe. The last 4 years represent the strongest in U.S. history, with U.S. agricultural product exports exceeding $478 billion.

Nearly 4,000 AMS professionals work every day to support agriculture, from individual farmers to international businesses, helping American agriculture remain competitive in a global marketplace. AMS' services and grant investments also create opportunities by supporting economic development in small towns and rural communities that stand as the backbone of American values.

Marketing Agreements and Orders

Marketing agreements and orders are initiated by industry to help provide stable markets for dairy products, fruits, vegetables, and specialty crops. They help maintain the quality of produce being marketed; standardize packages/containers; and authorize advertising, research, and market development. Each order and agreement is tailored to the needs of local market conditions for producing and selling.

Commodity Procurement

AMS purchases a variety of food products in support of USDA's National School Lunch Program and other food assistance programs. These purchases also help to stabilize prices in agricultural commodity markets. The purchases include around 250 different items, such as fresh fruits, vegetables, beef, and poultry. Each year, AMS issues over 2,000 contracts to purchase about 1.5 billion pounds of food, with about half of the contracts supporting U.S. small businesses.

AMS awards more than $60 million each year through its Organic Cost Share programs, the Farmers Market Promotion Program, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, and Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program.

www.ams.usda.gov

Quality Standards, Grading, Certification, Auditing, and Inspection

AMS quality standards, grading, certification, auditing, and inspection are voluntary tools and services that industry can use to help promote and communicate quality and wholesomeness to consumers. These services assist businesses in differentiating themselves from their competition. Examples of USDA grades include USDA Prime, USDA Grade A, and U.S. No. 1. Annually, AMS grades, audits, certifies and/or inspects over $150 billion worth of agricultural products, ensuring the quality of domestic goods and helping American farms and businesses export goods to over 100 different countries.

USDA Market News

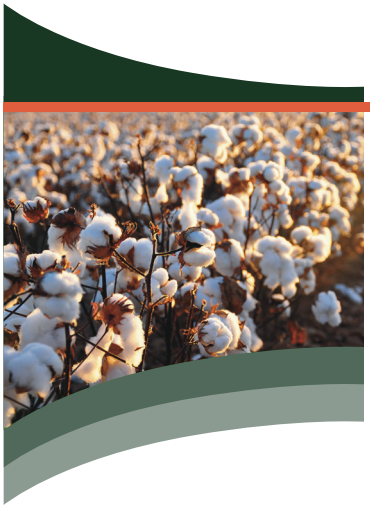
For 100 years, AMS has provided free, unbiased price and sales information to assist in the marketing and distribution of farm commodities. Each year, Market News issues thousands of reports providing the industry with key wholesale, retail, and shipping data. The reports give farmers, producers, and other agricultural businesses the information they need to evaluate market conditions, identify trends, make purchasing decisions, monitor price patterns, evaluate transportation equipment needs, and accurately assess movement. The information captures data for cotton, fruits, vegetables and specialty crops, livestock, meats, poultry, eggs, grain and hay, milk and dairy, and tobacco.

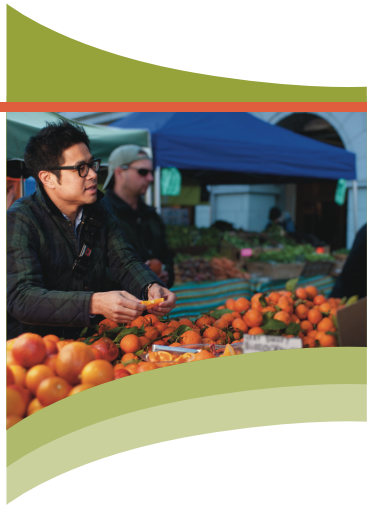
National Organic Program

Organic certification verifies that farms and handling facilities comply with the USDA organic regulations and allow farmers and businesses to sell, label, and represent their products as organic. The program protects the integrity of organic products through auditing certifiers, investigating complaints, and enforcement. The program also helps American farmers and processors tap into the growing international organic market through trade partnerships with several countries. Today, the industry encompasses over 17,000 organic businesses and has grown to $35 billion in annual U.S. retail sales.

Plant Variety Protection (PVP)

The PVP office grants certificates of intellectual property protection (similar to patents) to developers of new varieties of plants which are reproduced sexually by seed or are tuber propagated. This protection enables a breeder to market the variety exclusively for 20 years (25 years for trees and vines), which creates an incentive for the development of new varieties. The PVP office has issued more than 8,700 certificates of protection since 1970.





Farmers Markets and Local Food

AMS works to improve marketing opportunities for producers through the combination of research, technical services, and grants. Each year, AMS helps hundreds of agricultural food businesses, including farmers markets, food hubs, wholesale markets, retailers, State agencies, community planning organizations, and other agri-food focused groups, enhance their local food marketing efforts. Through the National Farmers Market Directory, AMS connects consumers to producers at over 8,000 farmers markets, providing location and operation information.

Research and Promotion

Research and Promotion programs, authorized by Congress, are industry-driven and industry-funded. AMS oversees over 20 research and promotion boards that empower farmers, ranchers, and agricultural businesses. The programs establish a framework to pool resources to develop new markets, strengthen existing markets, and conduct important research and promotion activities. AMS provides oversight, ensuring fiscal responsibility, program efficiency, and fair treatment of participating stakeholders.

Seed Regulatory and Testing Services

AMS helps support the $12 billion U.S. seed industry by educating and training analysts from State governments, industry organizations, and private companies on Federal or State seed laws, changes in industry rules, and both common and advanced testing and, identification techniques with the goal of promoting uniformity in seed testing throughout the United States. This support helps seed companies remain competitive both domestically and abroad.

Laboratory Approval and Testing Services

AMS National Science Laboratories (NSL) is a full-service testing facility that provides analyses on raw and processed agricultural commodities. NSL provides chemical, microbiological, bimolecular, and physical testing services in support of grading, commodity purchases, research, and domestic and export marketing. Also, AMS administers laboratory approval programs to enhance market access for U.S. commodities, domestically and internationally. This service verifies that products meet various customers' or countries' testing requirements.

Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA)

PACA was enacted at the request of the fruit and vegetable industry to promote fair trade in the industry. The PACA protects businesses dealing in fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables by establishing and enforcing a code of fair business practices and by helping companies resolve business disputes.

Front page photos: girl picking tomatoes and hillside with dairy cows courtesy Gunnar Magnusson.

Photos on this page: cotton field courtesy Kimberly Vardeman; San Francisco Farmers Market courtesy Gary Yost

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