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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Agricultural Marketing Service

7 CFR Parts 53 and 54

[No. LS-94-009]

Standards for Grades of Slaughter Cattle and Standards for Grades of Carcass Beef

AGENCY: Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), USDA.

ACTION: Final rule, postponement of effective date.

SUMMARY: This document postpones the effective date of the final rule (61 FR 2891-2898) to revise the official U.S. standards for grades of carcass beef and the related standards for grades of slaughter cattle from July 1, 1996, until January 31, 1997. Upon the effective date, the changes eliminate "B" maturity (approximately 30-42 months of age) carcasses with small or slight marbling degrees from the Choice and Select grades and include them in the Standard grade. This action is being taken because carcasses with these characteristics have been shown to be both variable and often unacceptable in palatability, which contributes significantly to inconsistent palatability of Choice and Select grade beef. The standards for grades of slaughter cattle, which are based on the beef carcass grades, are revised to parallel the changes in the beef carcass grade standards. The extension of the effective date is in response to several requests asking for additional time to make needed adjustments to management strategies in order to respond to the grade change.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The effective date of the final rule is postponed from July 1, 1996, to January 31, 1997.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Herbert C. Abraham, Chief, Livestock and Meat Standardization Branch,

Livestock and Seed Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090-6456, 202/720-4486.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On January 19, 1995, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), U.S. Department of Agriculture, under authority of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, as amended (7 U.S.C. 1621-1627), published a proposed rule (60 FR 3982-3986) to revise the official U.S. standards for grades of carcass beef and the related slaughter cattle standards by eliminating "B" maturity (approximately 30-42 months of age) carcasses with small or slight marbling degrees from the Choice and Select grades and including them in the Standard grade. In consideration of the over 400 written comments received on the proposal, and all other available information, the proposed rule was adopted and a final rule was published on January 30, 1996, (61 FR 2891-2898). To allow the industry time to adjust its production and marketing practices and to market beef currently in the pipeline, implementation was scheduled for July 1, 1996.

Since the publication of the final rule, AMS has received several requests from several State cattle associations, a national packer organization, and several members of Congress to delay the effective date. The requests for a delay primarily focused on the belief that it is in the industry's best interest to provide a "full" adjustment period of 18 months prior to implementation, which they indicated was provided for in the AMS economic analysis. They stated this would allow the industry to better adjust management strategies to conform to the new revised standards. In the published final rule, the Department did not conclude that an 18-month adjustment period was necessary prior to implementation of the changes. The reference to an 18-month period in the final rule was one of the periods of time after implementation used to calculate the economic impact of the changes rather than a period of time for delaying implementation. It was concluded that during the 18-month period following implementation, there would be a net positive impact of \$86-million if only 25 percent of the B-maturity carcasses were eliminated through improved management

practices. Greater benefits would accrue if more than 25 percent of the B-maturity carcasses were eliminated. A 5-month period prior to implementation was provided so many of the cattle now in feedlots could be marketed before the changes became effective. Although an 18-month adjustment period was never intended, AMS recognizes there may be some confusion about establishment of the implementation date, and that implementation of the changes at a time of large beef supplies and high grain prices may not be in the best economic interest of the industry. Consequently, AMS has decided to delay implementation of the beef grade changes. Although the sooner that changes in production and management practices are implemented, the greater the total benefits to the entire beef industry, AMS recognizes that there are some situations where short-term economic losses might occur and this additional delay should allow market forces to adjust by the implementation date. The delay in no way prevents cattle producers and feeders from adopting new management strategies at this time to minimize the production of B-maturity carcasses.

Therefore, the effective date of the final rule that was published at 61 FR 2891-2898 on January 30, 1996, is postponed until January 31, 1997.

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 1621-1627.

Dated: April 24, 1996.

Lon Hatamiya,
Administrator.

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Food and Consumer Service

7 CFR Parts 272 and 273

[Amendment No. 369]

RIN 0584-AC08

Food Stamp Program: Failure to Comply with Federal, State, or Local Welfare Assistance Program Requirements

AGENCY: Food and Consumer Service, USDA.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This action amends Food Stamp Program regulations to prohibit an increase in food stamp benefits when a household's benefit from another