

USDA supervises meal coordination program

In our fast-moving, mobile world, increasing numbers of Americans are eating one or more of their daily meals away from home, often in institutional settings. These range from schools and hospitals, to employee dining facilities (both here and abroad), to airlines, oceans liners, trains, and so on.

Each institution has unique needs. Schools, for example, must buy portion sizes that the average child can be expected to finish.

Enter the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) acceptance program - a

personalized, tailor-made service which insures that such institutional buyers will indeed receive a product that meets their exact specifications.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), on request, will check the food for quality and whatever other specifications the institution has requested. The work is handled by AMS's various divisions - Fruit and Vegetable, Livestock, Poultry, Dairy, and Grain - and is done by officially

designated, thoroughly experienced graders.

USDA graders check quality on the basis of the U.S. grade standards for food - standards that are easily understood and recognized by the industry and trade. When working for an acceptance program client, however, the grader also checks to see that the products meet the needs of the individual user, as spelled out in his purchase specifications. Thus the service is personalized.

Companies that employees abroad need products with long shelf life. Ocean liners must be able to buy products that will ripen at various stages of the journey.

Airline food must freeze well until ready for use. Moreover, steaks and other foods served must be of the same size - so that one passenger will not feel himself slighted at the sight of another passenger's larger steak.

The varieties of special requirements are infinite and can make buying an extremely complex chore for the institutional purchasing agent. Moreover, many have found that repeated trips to suppliers to see that they are getting exactly what they need at a reasonable price are often exercises in frustration.

As Pat Galente of the State of Connecticut Purchasing Department put it, "in the meat business particularly, you have to have very strong grading procedures to guarantee that you are getting what you buy."

For an institution using

USDA's meat acceptance service, an AMS grader would check for such things as: weight tolerance for portion control items, the condition of the product, fat thickness, the grade, and whether or not the packaging will insure proper storage.

The vendor pays for the service. The cost runs from \$13 to \$16.20 an hour, with higher charges for overtime, weekend, and holiday work. While the institutional buyer establishes his own buying specs for most foods, for meats he can use the Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications (IMPS). Using IMPS, the buyer has a choice of two acceptance procedures. He may have 100 percent examination of his purchase or he may choose statistical sampling acceptance. If he chooses the latter, only samples of a particular product will be checked. Statistical acceptance cuts the cost of the acceptance program to the user, particularly where large lots are involved.

The States of Connecticut, New York and New Jersey, Nassau County (New York), the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, the Cunard, Moore-McCormack, and U.S. Lines, and Veterans' Administration hospitals are some of the organizations using the AMS acceptance program.

The Connecticut Purchasing Department has been using the service for more than 15 years. It provides food to every state institution - correctional, hospital, schools, mental facilities, and regional centers.

Connecticut's Pat Galente has no doubt that the program keeps up the quality of the products he buys because it provides the Purchasing Department with a knowledgeable individual - the USDA grader - to deal with the vendors.

Mildred Welsh, Senior Buyer of the State of New Jersey's Purchase Bureau, is equally satisfied with AMS' acceptance program and uses it for fresh and frozen meats that are sent to institutions.

This service, she says, "makes it possible for vendors to bid on the same specifications and the State, in turn, knows exactly what quality of meat it will be getting." The program, in her opinion, is what keeps the vendors from selling the State inferior or unsuitable merchandise.

The Cunard Steamship Line, when provisioning the Queen Elizabeth II and its other ships, insists on different degrees of maturity in fruits and vegetables purchased for voyages. Percy G. Lambert, Assistant Purchasing Superintendent, explains it this way:

"Beyond our requirements that all food served aboard ship must be wholesome and of the best quality, we're concerned with the problem of possible spoilage or uneconomical use of refrigerating space. To avoid the dilemma, we require that half of certain purchases, such as soft fruits and tomatoes, must be firm ripe, and the balance hard to firm. By the time the firm ripe items are consumed, the hard to firm have ripened and are ready for eating."

Carmino Cavallo, USDA Officer-in-Charge for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, at Hunts Points, NY, explains that the steamship line puts these requirements into its specifications, and that the USDA grader operates from these specifications when checking the vendors' products. If a particular vendor cannot meet the specifications, USDA contacts Cunard to explain the situation. But the decision to accept merchandise that is not up to specifications is left to Cunard.

Jim Davis, Purchasing Director of New York's plush, prestigious Plaza Hotel states that USDA's grading and standards act as guidelines for him. AMS graders see to it that the eggs the Plaza buys for example, are the size requested. Exact standardization is of crucial importance to the Plaza, and Mr. Davis feels that the acceptance program makes it possible for them to be assured of having it.

The program is beneficial

4-Hers will celebrate Rural Life Sunday

Congressman William F. Goodling will be the speaker at a county-wide Rural Life Sunday Service planned by members of the York County 4-H Council. It will be held on Sunday, May 23 at 7:30 p.m. at the 4-H Center, near Bair. The public is invited to attend.

Members participating in the service are: Amy Norek, Joey Welsh, Gary Welsh, Karen Webb, Marvin Krone, Jack Parr, Tom Welsh, Megan Shaub, Kelly Rentzel, Tim Beck, Chris Waltersdorff, Martin Krone, Bonnie Wire, Brooke Palmer, Joann Cramer, and Laurie Dobrosky. (One day a year is designated as Rural Life Sunday. On that day, God's special blessing on rural life, its resources, land and people are asked. In a larger sense, the day is, and ought to be, a day of dedication, reflection, and stocktaking for use in the seasons to come.)

to handlers, processors, and wholesalers as well as to the purchasing agents. The benefit is in having the security of a USDA certificate attesting to the grade and condition of food leaving the vendor's place of business.

If you are an institutional food purchaser and would like to use the acceptance program, or want more information about it, contact your regional AMS office, or write: Information Division, AMS USDA, 26 Federal Plaza, Room 1653, New York, New York 10007. If you would like specific information on poultry, ask for "USDA's Acceptance Service for Poultry and Eggs," Marketing Bulletin 46. For livestock, ask for "USDA's Acceptance Service for Meat and Meat Products," Marketing Bulletin 47. For the last two publications write to AMS Information Division, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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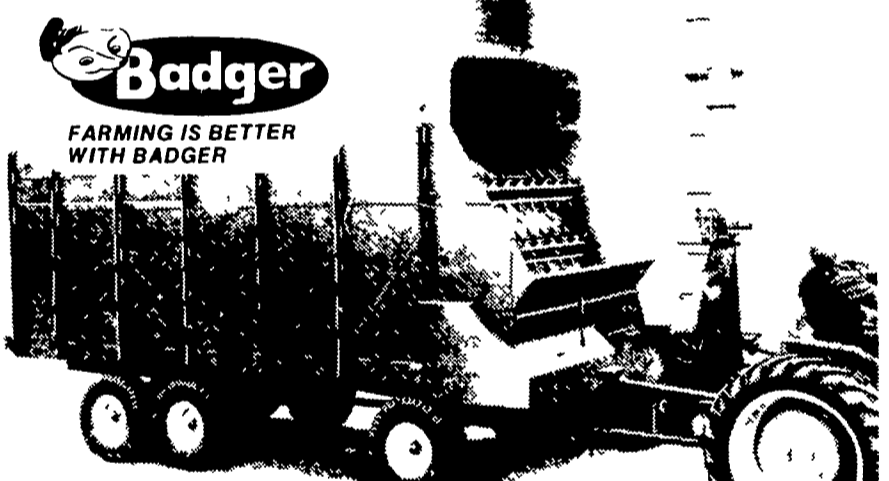

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