CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Food standards, definitions, and specifications affect every man, woman, and child in this country. Many standards have been formulated and announced as regulatory orders at the federal level. They are applicable to all foods which move in interstate commerce. In addition many states and cities have adopted the same standards for food products in intra-state and municipal trade. Standards are designed for many purposes. They embody differing principles and are promulgated or otherwise made official under procedures varying in certain respects, depending upon the agency which has jurisdiction over the particular standard or specification.

Based on Webster's unabridged dictionary, the definition of "standard" which most nearly fits this guidebook is: "... something that is set up and established by authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value, or quality: ..."\(^1\)

This guidebook is concerned with U.S. grade standards, definitions and standards of identity, federal specifications, military specifications, and advisory standards of various federal agencies. There is no single or centralized official agency in the federal government (or elsewhere so far as the authors can discover) from which information on all federal food standards may be obtained. The purpose of this guidebook is to provide in one place broad guiding information, samples, and sources of all federal food standards, and material relating to them.

Standards Encourage Uniformity, May Discourage Ingenuity

As in all areas of human endeavor, so too in foods, there are numerous and varying kinds of quality. Each experienced cook or chef would likely prepare a favorite soup by a different procedure, and each soup might well be of topmost suitability for certain consumers. Official standards never have been, never were intended to be, and never can be set at the very zenith of quality. Rather, official standards encourage qualities somewhat above average, at a quality level reasonably attainable by a substantial proportion of farmers, processors, sales and distribution organizations. Governmental agencies help greatly to formulate standards and to describe fully exactly what is required to meet a certain standard.

The thoughtful consumer will realize that standards of quality not only set floors, below which quality is not permitted to go, but at the same time some standards, wittingly or unwittingly, also set ceilings which deter further advancements toward even more attractive developments.

Generally speaking, however, standards, grade standards, definitions, and specifications are very essential and of far-reaching importance to farmers, to processors, to distributors, and to all of us as consumers. Standards help to assure and safeguard an ample supply of good wholesome food, to require that each product is what its label claims it to be, and to minimize deception or misunderstandings.

A careful and critical observer of official food standards will look not only to the standard as it is phrased, but also to the standard-making procedure. In addition, he will consider the record of constructive service to the greatest number of people fulfilled by the official standards.

Historical Highlights in the Development of Federal Food Standards in the U.S.A.

The export of meat was aided by federal legislation in the United States in 1894. In 1906, the Pure Food and Drug Law and another separate law, the Meat Inspection Act, were enacted. Butter was defined by Congressional Act in 1923 and while the standard for butter is administered and enforced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Congress has the exclusive right to change the definition of butter. The only other food defined by Congress is Nonfat Dry Milk. All other federal standards and definitions of foods are officially established, promulgated, and revised periodically by administrative agencies as explained and illustrated in the following chapters.

In 1927 the Food, Drug, and Insecticide Administration was created. In 1930 its name was changed to Food and Drug Administration. In 1940 the FDA was transferred to the Federal Security Agency, which in 1953 became the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Food inspection duties of the U.S. Department of Agriculture are conducted by its Meat Inspection Division, which is responsible for quality, wholesomeness, and safety of all red meats and many products from red-meat animals for human food and for pet food purposes. Meanwhile, in 1946 Congress passed the Agricultural Marketing Act as an aid and stimulus to orderly, fair, and high-quality marketing practices. This has added great impetus to extension and improvement of both voluntary and mandatory grade standards.

In 1957 Congress enacted the Poultry Products Inspection Act, which became fully effective January 1, 1959. Under this new law, all poultry
shipped in interstate trade is required to be inspected and labeled according to this new federal law and its regulations.

Advisory food standards concerning milk and drinking water, as well as standards for foods served on interstate trains, buses, and airplanes and all foods served on ships sailing under the United States flag are the responsibility of the U.S. Public Health Service.

Standards and definitions of fish and fish products are the divided responsibilities of several agencies. First there are standards by individual states at the shoreside fisheries' processing plants. In addition, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries of the U.S. Department of the Interior exercises an advisory role. Many marine products in interstate trade are subject also to coordinated regulation by the Food and Drug Administration and by the Public Health Service.

The military services utilize foods according to civilian standards so far as possible. Some Department of Defense needs, however, are necessarily different as judged by the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and the Coast Guard. These are called "Military Specifications."

Standards for alcoholic beverages such as wine, beer, and whisky are promulgated and administered by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax Division of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, U.S. Treasury Department.

The U.S. Department of Commerce must be cited for several important reasons. First, the National Bureau of Standards is included here because of its topmost authority and responsibilities on weights and measures. These are basic and imperative to all trade in foods, both intranationally and internationally. Thus, pertinent consideration to such matters as the ounce, pound, pint, quart, gallon, bushel, barrel, short ton, long ton, and units of weights and measures of foods common to this country and to some other parts of the world are provided in the chapter on the Commerce Department. Second, its Commodity Standards Division, Office of Technical Services, issues recommendations based on coordination with food processors. These are known as "Simplified Practice Recommendations." Third, the National Bureau of Standards is the distribution agency for an Atomic Energy Commission report which relates to foods.

Two other parts of the federal government deserve brief mention here concerning food standards. They are the Bureau of Prisons and the Small Business Administration. The Bureau of Prisons, a part of the Department of Justice, does not ordinarily originate the standards used in its food procurement. Rather, it utilizes principally the Federal Specifications as published by the General Services Administration (Chapter 12), Grade Standards as by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Definitions and Standards of Identity by the Food and Drug Administr-
tion and such other federal standards as it deems suitable. The Small Business Administration, in the Department of Commerce, assists its correspondents in obtaining Federal Specifications and other food standards. Although it occasionally issues brief lists of food standards it does not originate them.

The Veterans Administration, one of the independent agencies, publishes and distributes to its hospitals and to food suppliers, under its own name, standards for foods which the VA offices use as guides to their procurement. The VA standards are based on, and are usually identical with, those of the USDA, the FDA, and other agencies which have developed the food standards through extensive effort and experience.

As the over-all housekeeping department of the government, the General Services Administration (GSA) coordinates specifications, fulfills certain procurement roles and issues in its own name "Federal Specifications." These are coordinated with, or are predicated on, standards by agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Agriculture, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries and other administrative units of the government.

**Uniformity Encouraged by the Council of State Governments**

Approximately 30–35 of this country's 50 states, as well as Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, have adopted the same (federally official) definitions, standards, grades, and specifications for foods. That trend is effectively encouraged by the Council of State Governments. Coordination and simplification are expected to increase in the future. This will tend to lessen the complications, limitations, and unproductive costs involved in fulfilling needless variations prevalent up to this time in the laws or ordinances of some states and cities. It is desirable to achieve further simplification and, thus, economies respecting food standards, so the nation's efforts can be soundly and effectively applied toward the greatest human welfare.