

treatment of equal effectiveness is available to these producers, the requirement that sweetpotatoes must be fumigated to be moved interstate imposed an unnecessary economic hardship on these producers. Under these circumstances, the Administrator has determined that prior notice and opportunity for public comment are contrary to the public interest and that there is good cause under 5 U.S.C. 553 for making this action effective less than 30 days after publication in the **Federal Register**.

We will consider comments we receive during the comment period for this interim rule (see **DATES** above). After the comment period closes, we will publish another document in the **Federal Register**. The document will include a discussion of any comments we receive and any amendments we are making to the rule.

Executive Order 12866 and Regulatory Flexibility Act

This rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12866. For this action, the Office of Management and Budget has waived its review under Executive Order 12866.

We are amending the regulations to allow sweetpotatoes to be moved interstate from Hawaii if they undergo irradiation at an approved facility. The sweetpotatoes will also have to meet certain additional requirements, including inspection and packaging requirements. This action provides for the use of irradiation as an alternative to methyl bromide for the treatment of sweetpotatoes moved interstate from Hawaii.

Economic Importance of Sweetpotatoes in Hawaii and the Mainland United States

Commercial sweetpotato production in Hawaii occurs on the islands of Hawaii, Kauai, Maui, and Oahu. There were 53 sweetpotato farms in Hawaii in 1997.⁴ The production of sweetpotatoes in Hawaii amounted to 1.8 million pounds, and the value of these sweetpotatoes was \$900,000 in 2001 (table 1).

In the continental United States, sweetpotato is grown commercially in Alabama, California, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.⁵ North Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, and California account for the major proportion of production area by State (table 2). In total, the United States

produced 1.36 billion pounds of sweetpotatoes from 93,500 acres in 2003 (table 3).

TABLE 1.—PRODUCTION STATISTICS FOR HAWAIIAN SWEETPOTATOES (2001)

Item	Amount
Harvested acres	220
Yield per acre (1,000 pounds)	8.2
Production (1,000 pounds)	1,800
Farm price (cents per pound)	50
Value of sales (1,000 dollars)	900

Source: Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service.

TABLE 2.—ACRES OF SWEETPOTATOES PLANTED IN THE UNITED STATES (2003)

State	Acres planted
North Carolina	42,000
Louisiana	18,000
Mississippi	14,000
California	10,100
Texas	3,400
Alabama	2,900
Others ¹	3,100
Total	93,500

¹ Including Hawaii.

Source: Economic Research Service, USDA.

The crop is grown on 1,770 farms, which represents a decrease of 44 percent since 1987.⁶ Production of sweetpotatoes peaked in 1932 when 48 million cwt⁷ was generated, followed by a long-term downward trend in production. However, sweetpotato production trended higher again after 1988, and increased by 15 percent between 1989–1991 and 1999–2001. Farm cash receipts averaged \$214 million over the period 1999–2001. Few imports of sweetpotatoes enter the continental United States, with 97 percent of the import volume moving directly from the Dominican Republic into Puerto Rico. The Hawaiian sweetpotato production of 1.8 million pounds thus comprises a fairly minor proportion of the total production of 1,355 million pounds in the United States.

⁶ Lucier, G. "Sweet potatoes—getting to the root of demand." Economic Research Service, USDA, 2002.

⁷ "cwt" is an abbreviation for "hundredweight," the standard unit of production for sweetpotatoes. One hundredweight equals 100 pounds.

TABLE 3.—PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION STATISTICS FOR SWEETPOTATOES IN THE UNITED STATES (2003)¹

Item	Amount
Acres planted	93,500
Three year average yield (cwt/acre)	150
Production (million pounds)	1,355
Imports (million pounds)	17.0
Exports (million pounds)	53.0
Total utilization (million pounds) ²	1,148.3
Per capita use (pounds)	3.9
Three year average per capita use (pounds)	4.0
Current dollars (\$/cwt)	15.75
Constant 1996 dollars (\$/cwt)	13.91

¹ Estimates are for the total United States, and therefore include Hawaii. Forecasted estimates are shown.

² Total utilization includes 103 million pounds used for seed and 67.8 million pounds accruing to feed use, shrink, and loss.

Source: Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Acres were obtained from Lucier.⁸

More than three-quarters of the annual U.S. sweetpotato crop is sold as human food, and around two-thirds of the total sales are for the fresh market. About a quarter of the sweetpotatoes sold for food are processed into frozen products, and 2 to 3 percent are chipped or dehydrated. U.S. sweetpotato utilization averaged 1.1 billion pounds during 1999–2001, accounting for almost 3.9 pounds per capita.

Treatment Costs

Costs of Methyl Bromide Fumigation

Methyl bromide fumigation is currently conducted on the Island of Oahu. The product has to be moved by barge from the port of Hilo on the Island of Hawaii to the port of Honolulu on Oahu. The charge for such transportation is between 2 to 3 cents per pound. A pallet of sweetpotatoes weighs 1,500 pounds (50 30-pound boxes), so the charge is approximately \$35 per pallet for a non-chilled shipment. Trucking and handling charges to move the sweetpotatoes from the pier on Oahu to the fumigation site and, after fumigation, back to the pier or to the airport are estimated at \$34 per pallet.

The per-unit cost of methyl bromide fumigation is influenced by the number of pallets treated. Costs are \$610 for 1 to 6 pallets, \$1,026 for 7 to 9, and \$1,250 for 10 to 12. The minimum charge is \$610. Per-unit cost thus decreases as more pallets are treated within these ranges. For example, the cost decreases from 40.6 cents per pound to 6.7 cents

⁸ Lucier, G., *ibid*.

⁴ Census of Agriculture, 1997, National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).

⁵ NASS, 1999.