

Florida grapefruit handlers may be classified as small entities. The majority of Florida grapefruit producers may also be classified as small entities.

The overshipment of small-sized red seedless grapefruit contributes to poor returns and lower on-tree values. This rule continues to limit the volume of sizes 48 and 56 red seedless grapefruit shipped during the first 22 weeks of the 2003–04 season by establishing weekly percentages for each of the 22 weeks, beginning September 15, 2003. This rule sets the weekly percentages at 45 percent for weeks 1 and 2, 35 percent for week 3 through week 19, and at 40 percent for weeks 20, 21, and 22. The quantity of sizes 48 and 56 red seedless grapefruit that may be shipped by a handler during a particular week is calculated using the percentages set. This action supplies enough small red seedless grapefruit, without saturating all markets with small sizes. This action will help stabilize the market and improve grower returns. This rule uses the provisions of § 905.153. Authority for this action is provided in § 905.52 of the order. The Committee unanimously recommended this action at a meeting on July 1, 2003.

While the establishment of volume regulation may necessitate additional spot picking, which could entail slightly higher harvesting costs, in most cases this is already a standard industry practice. The Barber study indicates spot picking will only fractionally increase harvesting costs on just a small segment of the boxes picked. In addition, with spot picking, the persons harvesting the fruit are more selective and pick only the desired sizes and qualities. This reduces the amount of time and effort needed in sorting fruit, because undersized fruit is not harvested. This may result in a cost savings through reduced processing and packing costs. In addition, because this regulation is only in effect for part of the season, the overall effect on costs is minimal. Consequently, this rule is not expected to appreciably increase costs to producers.

If a 25 percent restriction on small sizes had been applied during the 22-week period for the three seasons prior to the 1997–98 season, an average of 3.1 percent of overall shipments during that period would have been constrained by regulation. A large percentage of this volume most likely could have been replaced by larger sizes for which there are no volume restrictions. Under regulation, larger sizes have been substituted for smaller sizes with a nominal effect on overall shipments.

In addition, handlers can transfer, borrow or loan allotment based on their

needs in a given week. Handlers also have the option of over shipping their allotment by 10 percent in a week, provided the over shipment is deducted from the following week's shipments. Approximately 227 loans and transfers were utilized last season. Statistics for 2002–03 show that, in only 2 weeks of the regulated period was the total available allotment used. Therefore, with the weekly percentages for the 2003–04 season set at the same levels as last season, the overall impact of this regulation on total shipments should be minimal.

The Committee believes establishing percentage of size regulation during the 2003–04 season will have benefits similar to those realized under past regulations. Handlers and producers have received higher returns under percentage of size regulation. In the three seasons prior to the first percentage of size regulation in 1997–98, prices of red seedless grapefruit fell from a weighted average f.o.b. price of \$7.80 per carton in October to a weighted average f.o.b. price of \$5.50 per carton in December. In the six seasons utilizing percentage of size regulation, red seedless grapefruit maintained higher prices throughout the season with a weighted average f.o.b. price of \$8.10 per carton in October, to an average f.o.b. price of \$7.06 per carton in December, and remained at around \$6.90 in April. Average prices for the season have also been higher during seasons with percentage of size regulation. The average season price for red seedless grapefruit was \$7.00 for the last six years compared to \$5.83 for the three prior years.

On-tree earnings per box for fresh red seedless grapefruit have also improved under regulation, providing better returns to growers. The average on-tree price for fresh red seedless grapefruit was \$4.42 for the seasons 1997–98 through 2001–02 with percentage of size regulation, compared to \$3.08 for the three years prior to regulation. Small growers have struggled the last eight seasons to receive returns near the cost of production. For many, the higher returns provided by percentage of size regulation meant the difference between profit and loss.

Shipments during the 22 weeks covered by this regulation account for nearly 60 percent of the total volume of red seedless grapefruit shipped to the fresh market. Considering this volume and the very limited returns from grapefruit for processing, it is imperative that returns from the fresh market be maximized during this period. Even a small increase in price when coupled with the volume shipped

represents a significant increase in the overall return to growers.

The Barber study stated that prices rose anywhere from 12.9 percent or \$.72 to 17.5 percent or \$1.00 per ⅔-bushel carton during percentage of size regulation. Even if this action were only successful in raising returns by \$.10 per carton, this increase in combination with the substantial number of shipments generally made during this 22-week period, would represent an increased return of nearly \$1.4 million. Consequently, any increased returns generated by this action should more than offset any additional costs associated with this regulation.

The purpose of this rule is to help stabilize the market and improve grower returns. Percentage of size regulation is intended to reduce the volume of the least valuable fruit in the market, and shift it to those markets that prefer small sizes. This regulation helps the industry address marketing problems by keeping small sizes (sizes 48 and 56) more in balance with market demand without glutting the fresh market with these sizes.

This rule provides a supply of small-sized red seedless grapefruit sufficient to meet market demand, without saturating all markets with these small sizes. This action is not expected to decrease the overall consumption of red seedless grapefruit. With supply in excess of demand, this rule is not expected to impact consumer prices or demand. The benefits of this rule are expected to be available to all red seedless grapefruit growers and handlers regardless of their size of operation. This rule will likely help small under-capitalized growers who need additional weekly revenues to meet operating costs.

The Committee considered several alternatives when discussing this action. One alternative discussed was changing the way loans and transfers are handled. Another alternative discussed was changing the way allotment base is calculated. The Committee agreed both alternatives should first be thoroughly reviewed by the Regulation Subcommittee to consider options to bring before the full Committee. Therefore, these alternatives were rejected.

In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35), the information collection requirements contained in this rule have been previously approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and assigned OMB No. 0581–0189. As with all Federal marketing order programs, reports and forms are periodically reviewed to reduce information