



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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WSDA hearing on asparagus standards set for Jan. 26 in Pasco

OLYMPIA – In order to provide greater flexibility for asparagus growers to attract retailers and consumers, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is proposing to amend state standards for asparagus grading and container requirements.

The proposal comes from the Washington Asparagus Commission, whose members are seeking more options in packaging and grade distinctions for asparagus. The proposal would adjust sizes allowed for asparagus stalk categories ranging from small diameter size to jumbo. WSDA would also drop rules on the types of containers the industry can use to market asparagus.

Comments on the proposal will be taken at a public hearing to be held at 10 a.m. Jan. 26 at Educational Service District 123, 3918 W Court St., Pasco.

“It would enhance producers’ ability to market domestically,” said Jim Quigley, manager of WSDA’s Fruit & Vegetable Inspection Program. “It’s a move to make Washington’s asparagus industry more competitive by allowing it to be creative with marketing options that attract large retailers, restaurants and consumers.”

Washington asparagus is shipped to virtually every state nationwide and to Europe and Asia. While asparagus processing has declined in this state, the fresh asparagus market has been more successful.

The Legislature has provided funds to develop automation and mechanization projects to assist the industry. WSDA and Washington State University have cooperated to research automation technology that will make the industry more competitive.

Preliminary statistics from the U.S. Department of Agriculture show some 10,000 acres of asparagus harvested last year—primarily in the Columbia Basin, the Yakima Valley and the Walla Walla area. The farmgate value of asparagus and the number of acres harvested have declined in recent years. Growers also have concerns over labor, marketing and prices, and imports.

The harvest season for Washington asparagus typically runs early April through June. It is expected that the adoption date for amending container and grade distinction rules, if approved, would be in place by then.

Information on the asparagus standard proposal is on the WSDA Web site’s [public rulemaking hearing calendar](http://agr.wa.gov/LawsRules/Rulemaking/HearingCalendar.htm) (<http://agr.wa.gov/LawsRules/Rulemaking/HearingCalendar.htm>). Comments are due by 5 p.m. Jan. 26 and may be sent to Maryann Connell, Fruit & Vegetable Inspection Program, Commodity Inspection Division, Washington State Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, WA 98504-2560; by e-mail at mconnell@agr.wa.gov or by FAX to the program at (360) 902-2085.

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