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the merits of the proceeding except as provided in paragraph (a) of this section.

(c) If an employee of the Department who is or may reasonably be expected to be involved in the decisional process of the proceeding receives or makes a communication prohibited by this section, the Department shall place on the public record of the proceeding:

- (1) All such written communications;
- (2) Memoranda stating the substance of all such oral communications; and
- (3) All written responses, and memoranda stating the substance of all oral responses thereto.

(d) Upon receipt of a communication knowingly made or knowingly caused to be made by a party in violation of this section, the Department may, to the extent consistent with the interest of justice and the policy of the underlying statute, take whatever steps are deemed necessary to nullify the effect of such communication.

(e) For the purposes of this section, *ex parte communication* means an oral or written communication not on the public record with respect to which reasonable prior notice to all interested parties is not given, but which shall not include requests for status reports (including requests on procedural matters) on any proceeding.

[42 FR 10833, Feb. 24, 1977]

§ 900.17 Additional documents to be filed with hearing clerk.

In addition to the documents or papers required or authorized by the foregoing provisions of this subpart to be filed with the hearing clerk, the hearing clerk shall receive for filing and shall have custody of all papers, reports, records, orders, and other documents which relate to the administration of any marketing agreement or marketing order and which the Secretary is required to issue or to approve.

§ 900.18 Hearing before Secretary.

The Secretary may act in the place and stead of a judge in any proceeding under this subpart. When he so acts the hearing clerk shall transmit the record to the Secretary at the expiration of the period provided for the filing of proposed findings of fact, conclusions

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and orders, and the Secretary shall thereupon, after due consideration of the record, issue his final decision in the proceeding: *Provided*, That he may issue a tentative decision in which event the parties shall be afforded an opportunity to file exceptions before the issuance of the final decision.

Subpart—Rules of Practice Governing Proceedings on Petitions To Modify or To Be Exempted From Marketing Orders

AUTHORITY: Sec. 5, 49 Stat. 753, as amended; 7 U.S.C. 608c.

§ 900.50 Words in the singular form.

Words in this subpart in the singular form shall be deemed to import the plural, and vice versa, as the case may demand.

§ 900.51 Definitions.

As used in this subpart, the terms as defined in the act shall apply with equal force and effect. In addition, unless the context otherwise requires:

(a) The term *act* means Public Act No. 10, 73d Congress, as amended and as reenacted and amended by the Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937, as amended (7 U.S.C. and Sup. 601);

(b) The term *Department* means the United States Department of Agriculture;

(c) The term *Secretary* means the Secretary of Agriculture of the United States, or any officer or employee of the Department to whom authority has heretofore been delegated, or to whom authority may hereafter be delegated, to act in his stead;

(d) The terms *administrative law judge* or *judge* means any Administrative Law Judge, appointed pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 3105, and assigned to the proceeding involved;

(e) The term *Administrator* means the Administrator of the Agricultural Marketing Service, with power to redelegate, or any officer or employee of the Department to whom authority has been delegated or may hereafter be delegated to act in his stead.

(f) [Reserved]

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(g) The term **FEDERAL REGISTER** means the publication provided for by the act of July 26, 1935 (49 Stat. 500), and acts supplementary thereto and amendatory thereof;

(h) The term *marketing order* means any order or any amendment thereto which may be issued pursuant to section 8c of the act;

(i) The term *handler* means any person who, by the terms of a marketing order, is subject thereto, or to whom a marketing order is sought to be made applicable;

(j) The term *proceeding* means a proceeding before the Secretary arising under subsection (15)(A) of section 8c of the act;

(k) The term *hearing* means that part of the proceeding which involves the submission of evidence;

(l) The term *party* includes the Department;

(m) The term *hearing clerk* means the hearing clerk, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.;

(n) [Reserved]

(o) The term *decision* means the judge's initial decision in proceedings subject to 5 U.S.C. 556 and 557, and includes the judge's (1) findings of fact and conclusions with respect to all material issues of fact, law or discretion as well as the reasons or basis thereof, (2) order, and (3) rules on findings, conclusions and orders submitted by the parties;

(p) The term *petition* includes an amended petition.

[25 FR 5907, June 28, 1960, as amended at 26 FR 7796, Aug. 22, 1961; 28 FR 579, Jan. 23, 1963; 37 FR 8059, Apr. 25, 1972; 38 FR 29798, Oct. 29, 1973]

§ 900.52 Institution of proceeding.

(a) *Filing and service of petition.* Any handler desiring to complain that any marketing order or any provision of any such order or any obligation imposed in connection therewith is not in accordance with law, shall file with the hearing clerk, in quadruplicate, a petition in writing addressed to the Secretary. Promptly upon receipt of the petition, the hearing clerk shall transmit a true copy thereof to the Administrator and the General Counsel, respectively.

(b) *Contents of petition.* A petition shall contain:

(1) The correct name, address, and principal place of business of the petitioner. If petitioner is a corporation, such fact shall be stated, together with the name of the State of incorporation, the date of incorporation, and the names, addresses, and respective positions held by its officers; if an unincorporated association, the names and addresses of its officers, and the respective positions held by them; if a partnership, the name and address of each partner;

(2) Reference to the specific terms or provisions of the order, or the interpretation or application thereof, which are complained of;

(3) A full statement of the facts (avoiding a mere repetition of detailed evidence) upon which the petition is based, and which it is desired that the Secretary consider, setting forth clearly and concisely the nature of the petitioner's business and the manner in which petitioner claims to be affected by the terms or provisions of the order, or the interpretation or application thereof, which are complained of;

(4) A statement of the grounds on which the terms or provisions of the order, or the interpretation or application thereof, which are complained of, are challenged as not in accordance with law;

(5) Prayers for the specific relief which the petitioner desires the Secretary to grant;

(6) An affidavit by the petitioner, or, if the petitioner is not an individual, by an officer of the petitioner having knowledge of the facts stated in the petition, verifying the petition and stating that it is filed in good faith and not for purposes of delay.

(c) *Motion to dismiss petition*—(1) *Filing, contents, and responses thereto.* If the Administrator is of the opinion that the petition, or any portion thereof, does not substantially comply, in form or content, with the act or with the requirements of paragraph (b) of this section, or is not filed in good faith, or is filed for purposes of delay, he may, within thirty days after the filing of the petition, file with the Hearing Clerk a motion to dismiss the petition, or any portion thereof, on one