

Program Notice

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SPECIAL GRADE “AROMATIC” RICE

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1. PURPOSE

The Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) is revising the criteria for determining the special grade "Aromatic" in rice under the [Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 \(AMA\)](#). These revisions are designed to align inspection instructions with current industry practices and evolving market conditions.

2. BACKGROUND

AMS conducts regular outreach with industry and stakeholders to ensure commodity inspection criteria remain aligned with current market needs. Stakeholders, including USA Rice, requested revisions to the special grade "aromatic" criteria to address instances in which aromatic odor is detected in rice that has not been declared as an aromatic variety (e.g., basmati and jasmine) and is consequently treated as having a commercially objectionable foreign odor (COFO).

Previously, if the applicant did not declare the rice as an aromatic variety and an aromatic odor was detected, inspectors were required to classify the rice as having a COFO odor, resulting in a U.S. Sample Grade designation. Rice industry representatives asserted that the existing policy designating an aromatic odor as a COFO condition was overly stringent, and that the presence of an aromatic odor in a non-aromatic rice variety is, in many cases, commercially acceptable.

On November 18, 2025, AMS published a notice in the Federal Register ([90 FR 51636](#)) requesting comments, recommendations, and other information from stakeholders about potential changes to the U.S. Standards for Rough Rice, Brown Rice for Processing, and Milled Rice. Additionally, the notice requested comments on issues presented to AMS by industry including current aromatic odor policies and requirements.

AMS evaluated all submitted comments and concluded that implementing this policy change would enhance the efficiency of U.S. rice trade and marketing by establishing more consistent and less complex grade requirements; while eliminating provisions the rice industry no longer considers pertinent to commerce or that create unnecessary impediments.

3. POLICY

Effective immediately, if an aromatic odor is detected in a non-aromatic rice variety or in rice that has not been declared as an aromatic variety, the rice will no longer be classified as having a COFO odor. To ensure transparency in describing the condition of the rice, the presence of the odor must still be documented. Record "Aromatic odor detected" in the "Remarks" section of the work record and certificate when the odor is detected in the sample.

Follow the updated procedures and criteria below when determining special grade aromatic (AROM) for rough rice, brown rice for processing, and milled rice.

The [Rice Inspection Handbook](#) will be revised to reflect these changes in the next handbook update. References in the handbook directing inspectors to classify aromatic odor as COFO in non-aromatic rice varieties, or in rice not declared as aromatic, will be removed.

This policy change does not preclude interested parties from specifying, within contractual documents, whether “aromatic” rice varieties or rice exhibiting an aromatic odor may be accepted or excluded. Contract and load order specifications should explicitly state when an aromatic odor and/or an “aromatic” variety is not acceptable to the buyer.

4. PROCEDURES

3.25 AROMATIC ROUGH RICE

Definition. *Special varieties of rice (Oryza sativa L. scented) that have a distinctive and characteristic aroma (e.g., basmati and jasmine rice).*

Basis of Determination. Determine the special grade aromatic (AROM) on the basis of the odor of the lot as a whole, the representative sample as a whole, or a representative portion of well-milled rough rice. Record “Aromatic odor detected” in the “Remarks” section of the work record and certificate when the odor is detected in the sample.

Certification. If the rough rice is declared by the applicant at the time of inspection to be an aromatic variety and has an odor common to such rice, consider the rice to be “aromatic” and show the special grade “Aromatic” on the grade line of the work record and the certificate.

Note: If the rice is declared to be an aromatic variety by the applicant at the time of inspection but the basis of odor by official personnel is not determined to be an aromatic odor, then the rice will not be considered special grade, “Aromatic.”

4.35 AROMATIC BROWN RICE FOR PROCESSING

Definition. *Special varieties of rice (Oryza sativa L. scented) that have a distinctive and characteristic aroma (e.g., basmati and jasmine rice).*

Basis of Determination. Determine the special grade aromatic (AROM) on the basis of the odor of the lot as a whole, the representative sample as a whole, or a representative portion of well-milled brown rice for processing. Record “Aromatic odor detected” in the “Remarks” section of the work record and certificate when the odor is detected in the sample.

Certification. If the brown rice for processing is declared by the applicant at the time of inspection to be an aromatic variety and has an odor common to such rice, consider the rice to be “aromatic” and show the special grade “Aromatic” on the grade line of the work record and the certificate.

Note: If the rice is declared to be an aromatic variety by the applicant at the time of inspection but the basis of odor by official personnel is not determined to be an aromatic odor, then the rice will not be considered special grade, “Aromatic.”

5.39 AROMATIC MILLED RICE

Definition. *Special varieties of rice (Oryza sativa L. scented) that have a distinctive and characteristic aroma (e.g., basmati and jasmine rice).*

Basis of Determination. Determine the special grade aromatic (AROM) on the basis of the odor of the lot as a whole or the representative sample as a whole. Record “Aromatic odor detected” in the “Remarks” section of the work record and certificate when the odor is detected in the sample.

Certification. If the milled rice is declared by the applicant at the time of inspection to be an aromatic variety and has an odor common to such rice, consider the rice to be “aromatic” and show the special grade “Aromatic” on the grade line of the work record and the certificate.

Note: If the rice is declared to be an aromatic variety by the applicant at the time of inspection but the basis of odor by official personnel is not determined to be an aromatic odor, then the rice will not be considered special grade, “Aromatic.”

5. SPECIAL GRADE “AROMATIC” RICE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question 1. Is an aromatic odor detected in “non-aromatic” or undeclared varieties of rice considered a Commercially Objectionable Foreign Odor (COFO) and graded as U.S. Sample Grade?

Answer 1:

No, the odor is not considered COFO if detected and would not make the lot/sample U.S. Sample Grade. However, when detected, “Aromatic odor detected” must be recorded in the “Remarks” section the work record and certificate to be fully transparent in the marketing and condition of the rice.

Question 2. Can the customer declare special grade “Aromatic” after the inspection is performed and the odor is detected?

Answer 2:

Aromatic varieties should be declared at time of inspection to prevent false or inaccurate representation of the product. If the customer does not declare the rice is an aromatic variety (e.g., basmati and jasmine) at the time of inspection or is unsure if the rice is an aromatic variety, and an aromatic odor is detected, do not assign the special grade “Aromatic” unless the applicant provides sufficient evidence or documentation supporting the rice meets the special grade definition in addition to the presence of the odor. When detected, “Aromatic odor detected” must be recorded in the “Remarks” section of the work record and certificate to be fully transparent in the marketing and condition of the rice.

Question 3. What if the customer declares special grade “Aromatic”, but an aromatic odor is not detected?

Answer 3:

It would not be considered special grade “Aromatic”. However, the customer still has the option of requesting an appeal and board appeal.

Question 4. What if a buyer doesn’t want to receive a non-aromatic variety of rice with an aromatic odor present in the lot?

Answer 4:

Contract and load order specifications should state that an aromatic odor and/or aromatic variety will not be accepted by the buyer.

6. FILING INSTRUCTIONS

An electronic version of this notice is available on the [AMS website](#). Maintain a printed copy of this notice with the Rice Inspection Handbook at locations where physical copies are required in accordance with [FGIS Program Notice PN-25-04 Issuance Retention Policy](#), when applicable.

7. QUESTIONS

Direct questions concerning this program notice to Policies Procedures Market Analysis Branch at FGISPoliciesProceduresMarketAnalysisBranch@usda.gov.