

Specialty Crops Program



Commercial Item Descriptions

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Specialty Crops Inspection Division (SCI) provides quality assurance reviews and inspections, conducts food safety auditing, and develops national standards for fresh and processed fruits, vegetables, nuts, and other specialty products—all in support of America's food industry supply chain.

What are CIDs?

Commercial Item Descriptions (CIDs) are documents that describe the most important characteristics of a commercial product, such as the types and styles of products available. CIDs may also include information about analytical tests and requirements for food safety and quality for the product. CIDs are used by purchasers during the procurement process to specify the product they want to buy.

Visit the CIDs website at: www.ams.usda.gov/grades-standards/cids to view the list of current CIDs.

How and why are CIDs prepared?

CIDs are prepared by SCI food technologists and nutritionists, typically in response to a request by a purchaser. SCI conducts market research to gather information on all product options currently available on the commercial market, and then incorporates this information into a draft CID. The draft is then reviewed by manufacturers, interested government agencies, and food service professionals before being approved for use.

How and why are CIDs revised?

CIDs are revised when a request is received for a revision, when new options become available for a product, or on a 5-year basis. CIDs are updated to include new types and styles and any other pertinent information for that product.

How do I request a CID development or revision, or find a current CID?

To request the development or revision of a CID, contact the Specialty Crops Inspection Division using the current contact information on the CIDs website at: www.ams.usda.gov/grades-standards/cids.

Why should I comment on or review a CID?

It is important that both manufacturers and purchasers of a product are involved in the development and revisions of CIDs. Input from the purchasers informs us of any problems with the current CID and any changes that would help in the procurement process. Input from manufacturers ensures that the language and information in the CID does not exclude any current products.

Are CIDs mandatory?

No. CIDs are voluntary procurement documents that may be used by purchasers. They are NOT regulations, although many contain regulatory citations. It is not mandatory for a manufacturer to follow a CID. Manufacturers must only contractually comply with a CID when it is being used by a purchaser to specify a product that the manufacturer has agreed to supply.

Will a CID affect my current manufacturing process?

No. CIDs are procurement documents that are intended to describe currently available commercial products. They are not meant to dictate how a product is produced and will not impact a manufacturer's current processes, unless the purchaser uses the CID to specify that they wish to purchase a product made using a specific process (e.g., aseptic packaging).

Who do I contact if I have questions about CIDs?

For questions on CIDs, email CIDS@usda.gov or contact the Specialty Crops Inspection Division using the contact information on the CIDs website at: www.ams.usda.gov/grades-standards/cids.

Information contained in commercial item descriptions

The following information provides the order of the various sections of a CID and explains the general purpose and contents of each section.

- **Scope:** comprised of a concise statement describing the intended use of the CID.
- **Purchaser notes:** lists the items that the purchaser must and may specify.
- Typical items that must be specified by the purchaser are:
 - The desired options, e.g., types, styles, low sodium, etc.
 - If the age requirement at time of delivery is other than specified
 - If the analytical requirements are to be verified through product testing
 - If the product quality and safety are to be certified by the supplier or by USDA
 - Food defense and quality assurance inspection at the manufacturing plant of the purchased product
 - If the quality assurance inspection is a plant systems audit or a plant survey
 - Special packaging requirements
 - When bid samples are necessary to define quality

- **Classification:** Foods are classified into categories based on their different types, styles, varieties, flavors, sizes, etc. The purchaser must specify the categories of the product they want to buy. Not all CIDs contain the Classification section.
- **Manufacturer's/Distributor's Notes:** lists the requirements that the supplier of the food item must meet if they are to manufacture the product for the purchaser.
- **Processing Guidelines:** contains guidelines, regulations, and specific requirements (such as age requirements, shelf life, temperature requirements, etc.) that pertain to the manufacturing of the product. Guidelines are not a requirement; but regulations and requirements must be followed during production.
- **Salient Characteristics:** describes the physical and functional properties of the product that must be met. It includes information on the requirements for flavor, odor/aroma, texture, appearance, ingredients, defects/foreign material, and any other salient characteristics that are important for the specific product.
- **Analytical Requirements:** states analytical and microbiological requirements that are important in determining the final quality and safety of the food product to be purchased. The purchaser must specify if the food product to be purchased must comply with the requirements stated or if the requirements are to be different. The purchaser must also state if analytical testing made in accordance with the stated methods are required to verify whether the food product meets the analytical requirements. The test methods specified in this section are the methods that USDA will use to evaluate the analytical requirements when the analytical testing is specified. Vendors can use any method they want. Not all CIDs contain the Analytical Requirements section.
- **Manufacturer's/Distributor's Product Assurance:** states that the manufacturer of the purchased product must meet the salient characteristics of the CID and its own specifications, standards, and quality assurance practices. The purchaser has the right to require the manufacturer to provide proof of this conformance.
- **Regulatory Requirements:** states that the delivered product to be purchased must meet all applicable Federal, State, and local mandatory requirements and regulations and that the product must comply with all applicable provisions of the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.
- **Quality Assurance Provisions:** The purchaser must choose whether the supplier or SCI will certify that the purchased product meets or exceeds the requirements of the CID. SCI will select random samples of the packaged product and evaluate the conformance of the product based on the requirements of the CID. Also, the purchaser may require that the manufacturer undertake a quality assurance inspection and provide evidence of this by certificate. The purchaser can choose one of three quality assurance inspections: food defense system survey, the plant systems audit, or the plant survey.
- **Packaging:** specifies that all aspects of packaging must be commercial, unless otherwise specified by the purchaser.
- **USDA Inspection Notes:** lists the requirements that are to be evaluated for compliance if the purchaser selects USDA/SCI to certify the purchased product.
- **Reference Notes:** lists USDA certification and analytical laboratory contacts, as well as sources of documents referenced in the CID. All government activities involved with preparing, coordinating, and reviewing the CID are also listed at the end of each CID.