



**To the valued customers and stakeholders of the AMS
Cotton and Tobacco (C&T) Program:**



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and Monica Alexander, C&T Associate Deputy
Administrator.***

Welcome to the third edition in our series of C&T external stakeholder newsletters. We will continue to publish these twice per year to provide updates on Program operations, activities, and noteworthy items. In this issue, we will provide updates on our operational performance during COVID-19, the development and implementation of new confidentiality language for our Market News Division, a new internal training program, our recent standards matching, and plans for the upcoming cotton season. In addition, we will provide updated progress on the construction of the new Lubbock Cotton Classification Complex.

Earlier in 2021, C&T worked with the American Cotton Shippers Association and the National Cotton Council to develop confidentiality language to use when collecting market information from merchants, cooperatives, and other sources. This was requested to ensure that any information provided to C&T for use in formulating summary market new reports would be confidential and not published individually. This provision was already part of the statutes governing market news, but the new language provided more specificity to meet the stakeholders' needs and request. The Program worked over several months to get the language vetted with stakeholders and the Agency's Office of General Counsel.

Our Program developed and launched a new internal training curriculum beginning in early 2021. The goal of this comprehensive curriculum is to utilize the knowledge, skills, and abilities contained within our workforce to provide applied training opportunities to our entire staff. This innovative training program will be ongoing with new and revised classes available each year in all areas of operations and administration. We will couple this with traditional training to reduce costs while preparing our team with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful and build future succession in the Program.

The C&T Program's Standardization and Engineering Division (S&E) recently completed its annual matching of Universal Cotton Standards with the assistance of industry representatives who came in to visually inspect all boxes made by the Program over the last several months. On June 15, we matched 1,480 Upland grade boxes to the year 1986 originals in our Memphis complex. These were then photographed and prepared for global availability on their effective date of July 1. On July 7, we matched 150 American Pima grade boxes in our Visalia, CA Classing Office. I want to extend my sincere appreciation to all the industry stakeholders representing producers, ginner, merchants, manufacturers, cooperatives, and international signatories who took time from their busy schedules and participated in the matching processes in Memphis and Visalia. Matching the standards is an essential process for our Program each year and we are fortunate to have industry representatives willing to assist us in these endeavors.

As we near the beginning of the 2021 cotton season, our classing offices are preparing their operations and equipment, testing processes and systems, and conducting refresher training. On July 28, 2021, Secretary Vilsack provided USDA employees with updated guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for federal employees, on-site contractors, partners, volunteers, customers, and visitors in areas of "substantial" or "high" community COVID-19 transmission. The guidance requires all persons, whether unvaccinated or vaccinated, to wear a mask in Federal buildings. The protocols for our classing offices will follow this updated guidance from USDA. Please take a look at the updated office protocols in the side section of this newsletter for more details.

As we continue to navigate through changing times, we are optimistic about the remainder of 2021 and beyond. We will continue to provide the high level of service expected by the cotton industry and the world. As we hopefully move out of a pandemic, we continue to encourage any of our stakeholders who are interested in learning more about our Program and the cotton classification process to visit their area classing office or our Memphis, TN headquarters. Seeing our operations will provide a much clearer understanding than reading or hearing about it. We value the confidence and trust given to us by all our stakeholders and we realize and appreciate the importance of our role in the overall supply chain.

Thank you all for your continued business and trust in our Program and its services. We wish all of you the best in 2021 and 2022!