

**PROPOSED CHANGES FOR AMERICAN PIMA  
STANDARDS AND CLASSIFICATION**

**Lee Gibson, Assistant Chief  
Standardization and Quality Assurance Branch  
USDA, AMS, Cotton Program  
Memphis, TN**

**Abstract**

The AMS Cotton Program provides classification services on American Pima cotton for producers located primarily in the western and southwestern areas of the Cotton Belt. Approximately 660,000 samples of American Pima cotton will be classed at the Phoenix, Arizona and Visalia, California classing offices during the 1999 – 2000 cotton season.

The current classification system for American Pima includes a composite grade determined by comparison to the USDA standards for American Pima. On September 15, 1999 the Cotton Program received a formal request from the Supima Association of America to amend the method for grading American Pima cotton to allow for separate classer determinations for color and leaf content. Informal contacts with various industry leaders involved with American Pima indicate there is widespread support for moving forward with the request.

The Cotton Program is currently in the process of proposing changes to the existing American Pima standards and classification system to accommodate this request. If adopted, the proposed American Pima standards and classification system would be in effect for the 2001 cotton crop.

**Background**

The first USDA grade standards for American Egyptian (American Pima) were established in 1918. These standards consisted of five physical standards and five descriptive standards. The official American Pima grade standards were revised nine times from 1922 to 1986. The revisions were made to ensure that the grade standards were representative of the color, leaf, and preparation of cotton produced in the United States at that time. The number of standards for American Pima has ranged from five physical standards and five descriptive standards to nine physical standards and one descriptive standard. The official name was changed from American Egyptian to American Pima in 1970.

The last major revision to the American Pima standards occurred in 1986. The nine physical standards and one

descriptive standard were combined to form six physical standards and one descriptive standard.

In 1988, the Advisory Committee on Cotton Marketing recommended to the Secretary of Agriculture that the classer grade for Upland cotton be determined as two components, a color grade and a leaf grade. The Cotton Program successfully implemented the separation of color grade and leaf grade for Upland cotton during the 1993 cotton season. The revised Upland classification system allows the color grade and leaf grade to stand on its own merit, which provides a better description of the quality of the cotton. This change has been uniformly accepted by all segments of the cotton industry and has facilitated the marketing of U.S. Upland cotton.

The classification system for American Pima remained unchanged as a composite grade system in 1993. During the past few years, there have been numerous comments forwarded to the Cotton Program in regard to the American Pima composite grading system. The comments received indicated that although the American Pima cotton was being graded correctly, the composite system did not describe the cotton as complete as the Upland procedure, which determines the color and leaf grades separately. The composite grade introduced confusion into the marketplace because any given grade could represent a variety of different qualities of cotton.

**Current American Pima Standards and Classification**

The current standards for American Pima cotton consist of six physical standards, grade 01 through 06. The physical standards for grades 04, 05, and 06 contain bark as part of the standards. The Cotton Program prepares approximately 350 American Pima grade standards each year. Members of the cotton industry approve each grade standard during the annual standards matching process in much the same manner as Upland standards are approved for color grade and leaf grade.

The current classification system for American Pima grade is a composite system based primarily on appearance. This composite grade is determined through the integration of the factors of color; leaf and preparation based on the official standards for American Pima. The lowest grade factor usually determines the grade for American Pima cotton. However, there are exceptions in the current classification system that allows a sample to be assigned a grade higher or lower than the lowest grade factor.

The classification system allows for the averaging of grade factors for samples in which all grade factors do not fall within a range represented within one physical standard. In American Pima classification, when preparation is normal

and the color factor is two or more grades higher than the leaf factor, the grade will be assigned one grade higher than the leaf factor. In cottons where the leaf factor is two or more grades higher than the color factor and preparation is normal, the assigned grade will be one grade higher than the color factor.

The presence of bark in American Pima cotton is not considered as extraneous matter and it is not reported on classification records. Samples that contain bark cannot receive a grade higher than grade 04. For example, a sample with a color factor of grade 01 and a leaf factor of grade 01 with the presence of bark would automatically be assigned to grade 04. Samples that contain other types of extraneous matter, such as grass, oil, spindle twist, etc. are not reduced in grade during the classification process. These types of extraneous matters are noted on the official classification document.

Samples of American Pima cotton sometimes contain more color or are “redder” than the range of color represented by the official standards. The grade assigned for these types of samples in most cases is one grade lower than would normally be assigned. This classification rule is referred to as a red discount. Samples cannot be lowered more than one grade due to a red discount.

#### **Proposed American Pima Standards and Classification**

The Cotton Program will modify the current composite American Pima grade standards to establish official standards for color grade and leaf grade. The official standards for color grade will continue to consist of six physical standards, grade 01 through 06, and one descriptive standard, grade 07. Recent studies by the Cotton Program show there is no need to adjust the range of color or the leaf size in the proposed standards from the existing standards adopted in 1986. Bark will no longer be part of the official standards and will be removed from the physical standards for grades 04, 05, and 06.

The official standards for leaf grade will be the leaf content of the current American Pima physical standards. The leaf grade standards will be designated as Leaf grade No. 1 through Leaf grade No. 7. The official standards for leaf grade will consist of six physical standards, Leaf grade No. 1 through Leaf grade No. 6 and one descriptive standard, Leaf grade No. 7.

Under the proposed American Pima classification system, a color grade and a leaf grade will be assigned to each sample classed. The color grade and leaf grade determinations will be assigned by USDA classers through visual comparisons of samples to the appropriate physical standard for color or leaf. Since an official color grade and leaf grade will be assigned

to each sample, the current procedure that allows averaging factors of grade for samples in which all factors do not fall within the range represented by one physical standard will be eliminated.

The presence of bark in American Pima cotton will be considered as extraneous matter under the proposed classification system. The presence of extraneous matter, including bark, and other special conditions will be identified on the official classification record.

American Pima cotton will not be reduced in grade due to the presence of extraneous matter, which is the same as the present system.

#### **Conclusion**

The AMS Cotton Program is in the process of revising the existing American Pima standards and classification procedures to provide separate color grade and leaf grade determinations as proposed. The revised classification system will provide a better description of the quality of American Pima cotton by allowing the color grade and leaf grade to stand on its own merit, thus eliminating some of the confusion that now exists in the marketplace.

The Cotton Program has developed a timetable for the adoption and implementation of the proposed American Pima standards and classification procedures. The proposed standards will be displayed at various locations for the industry review during the spring of 2000. The proposed standards will then be displayed for industry approval at an American Pima conference, which will be held at the USDA Field Headquarters office in Memphis, TN. on June 13, 2000. If adopted, the Cotton Program will prepare standards for American Pima color grades and leaf grades during the spring of 2001 for use in the 2001 cotton crop. The revised American Pima standards for color grade and leaf grade will be reviewed during the Universal Standards conference in Memphis in June 2001.

The proposed rule for comments for the implementation of the revised American Pima standards and classification system will be published in the Federal Register. Interested parties will have 30 days from the time the proposed rule is published to make comments on the revised American Pima standards and classification system. The final rule for the revised American Pima standards and classification system will be published in the Federal Register in time for the new system to be in effect for the 2001 American Pima crop.