

*The
Connecticut
Agricultural
Experiment
Station,
New Haven*

Analysis
of Sizes in
Packaged Prunes

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Bulletin 888

March 1991

A cooperative study by The Connecticut
Agricultural Experiment Station and
the Food Division of the Connecticut
Department of Consumer Protection

SUMMARY

Thirty-one of 38 packages of prunes examined were labeled as containing a specific size or number of prunes per pound. Sixteen of the 31, or 52%, did not comply with the label claim or USDA size nomenclature. Eleven of the 16, or 69%, contained a size smaller than claimed and two, or 13%, contained a size larger than claimed.

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In the United States, 155,000 tons of dried prunes are produced each year (USDA 1989). Raisins are the only dried fruit with a higher production--363,000 tons. About one-third of the prunes are exported.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) lists a recommended size nomenclature for the number of unpitted prunes per pound (Code of Federal Regulations) and label claims for size should adhere to the USDA nomenclature.

Consumers purchase prunes based on size, e.g. small, medium, large; and by type, i.e. pitted or unpitted. Recently a consumer questioned the size of prunes she purchased. Examination showed the product to be mislabeled, i.e. small prunes instead of medium as claimed. This prompted testing of other brands to determine the accuracy of the size listed on the label.

METHODS

Packaged prunes were collected at food stores in Connecticut in August 1989 and again in January 1991 by an inspector of the Food Division of the Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection. In all cases but two, different codes were collected.

The net weight of the package and the number of prunes per pound was determined. The USDA size nomenclature is for unpitted prunes. To determine the number of prunes per pound when pitted prunes were tested, a value of 13% pits was used in the calculation (Composition of Foods 1982), i.e. number of pitted prunes found per pound X 0.87 = number of unpitted prunes per pound. The USDA designations for unpitted prunes are shown in Table 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thirty-eight packages of prunes were examined. These represented nine different brands. Five packages were

labeled as extra large, 17 as large, four as medium, six with no designation, and six with miscellaneous designations. All are listed by brand name in Table 2 with size claimed, type indicated as pitted (P) or unpitted (U), number of prunes found per pound, and the size found.

Of the 17 labeled as large, 8 were found with sizes smaller than claimed and one was found with a size larger than claimed (Table 3). All of the five labeled as extra large were labeled correctly. Amounts found that were only one prune more than the USDA nomenclature size (10% allowance for large, 7.1% for medium, and 5.5% for small) were considered satisfactory.

Of the four labeled as medium, three were found to be small and one extra large. No products were labeled as small. For the six with no designation, two were large, three were medium, and one was extra large. One product was labeled jumbo, but there is no USDA nomenclature for this size designation; they could be labeled as extra large. One sample labeled as bite size, for which there is no USDA nomenclature, was medium size and one package labeled as breakfast prunes was found to be less than small size. The two products labeled as containing a specific number of prunes per pound were found to be as labeled (Table 3).

Overall, of the 31 samples labeled as containing a specific size or number per pound, 16 did not comply with the label designation. Of these 16, two or 12.5% contained

Table 1. Recommended USDA size nomenclature for prunes.

Size ¹	No. prunes/pound
Extra large	43 or fewer
Large	44 - 53
Medium	54 - 67
Small	68 - 85

¹ There is no USDA designation for bite size or jumbo.

a larger size than claimed, 11 or 68.8% contained a smaller size than claimed, and for three or 18.8% there is no USDA size nomenclature.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The help of Inspector Linda Kranmas who collected the samples is acknowledged.

REFERENCES

USDA Agricultural Statistics 1989. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC.

Code of Federal Regulations, Title 9, Revised as of January 1, 1986. Office of the Federal Register, Washington, DC.

Composition of Foods 1982. USDA Handbook No. 8-9, Washington, DC.

Table 2. Analysis of prunes.

Brand	Size/type claimed	No./lb found (as unpitted)	Size found
DelMonte	large (U)	54	large***
DelMonte	large (U)	47	large
DelMonte	none (P)	57	medium
Harvest Fresh	extra large (U)	34	extra large
Harvest Fresh	extra large (U)	38	extra large
Harvest Fresh	large (P)	75	small*
Harvest Fresh	large (P)	61	medium*
Harvest Fresh	large (U)	54	large***
Harvest Fresh	large (U)	58	medium*
Harvest Fresh	none (P)	55	medium
Homa	jumbo** (U)	29	extra large*
Homa	jumbo** (U)	29	extra large*
Shop Rite	large (U)	54	large
Shop Rite	large (U)	50	large
Shop Rite	medium (U)	70	small*
Shop Rite	none (P)	51	large
Shop Rite	none (P)	58	medium
Stop & Shop	large (P)	43	extra large*
Stop & Shop	large (P)	53	large
Stop & Shop	large (U)	48	large
Stop & Shop	large (U)	57	medium*
Sunsweet	85-100 per lb (U)	84	small
Sunsweet	bite size** (P)	65	medium*
Sunsweet	breakfast (U)	88	< small
Sunsweet	extra large (U)	36	extra large
Sunsweet	large (U)	57	medium*
Sunsweet	medium (P)	40	extra large*
Sunsweet	medium (U)	70	small*
Sunsweet	medium (U)	73	small*
Sunsweet	none (P)	52	large
Sunsweet	none (P)	41	extra large
Sweet Life	large (P)	50	large
Sweet Life	large (U)	72	small*
Sweet Life	large (U)	58	medium*
Sweet Life	large (U)	58	medium*
Valley View	extra large (U)	37	extra large
Valley View	extra large (U)	36	extra large
Waldbaum's	20-30 per lb (U)	28	extra large

* Did not meet size designation or claim.

** No such USDA designation.

*** Values within one prune per pound (10% of allowance) were considered satisfactory.

(U) unpitted

(P) pitted

Table 3. Summary of sizes found in packaged prunes.

Size claimed	Packages tested	Ex. large	Large	Sizes found Medium	Small	<Small
Extra large	5	5	-	-	-	-
Large	17	1	8	6	2	-
Medium	4	1	-	-	3	-
No designation	6	1	2	3	-	-
Jumbo	2	2	-	-	-	-
Bite	1	-	-	1	-	-
Breakfast	1	-	-	-	-	1
Number/pound	2	1	-	-	1	-
Totals	38	11	10	10	6	1



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ISSN 0097-0905