

Seasonal Produce Desk

Seasonal shipping peaks meet cold-chain physics. How shippers and brokers combine USDA condition guidance with rate awareness for Nogales, Salinas, Yuma, and other produce corridors.

ProspectSentinel

~10 min read

USDA AH-66 + HB 669

For shippers & reefer desks

Rate Explorer

Transit Guide

Cold Chain Index

Precool Estimator

Executive brief

Seasonality changes volumes, origins, and rates — not the laws of heat transfer. A Yuma winter vegetable surge or Salinas shoulder still fails if mixed loads violate Groups 1–8 or if field heat rides east. This paper is the commercial layer on top of WP01–09: how a desk thinks when capacity is tight and the phone is loud.

Seasonal desk OS

1. **Commodity physics first** — setpoint, chill, ethylene, ice ([Produce Shipper Transit Guide](#), [Cold Chain Index](#)).
2. **Origin realities** — desert days, coastal humidity, border dwell, midnight loading culture.
3. **Equipment** — true multi-temp availability vs wishful tendering.
4. **Rate context** — USDA specialty crops truck rate awareness via [Produce Truck Rate Explorer](#) as a market snapshot, not a contractual quote engine.
5. **Claim posture** — peak season multiplies rushed precool and creative mixing; document harder, not less.

Peak-season failure patterns

- Loading hot to “catch the truck.”
- Combining leftovers across groups to fill cube.
- Skipping pulp checks because the line is long.
- Booking single-temp for a multi-temp problem because multi-temp is sold out.
- Arguing market freight rates while ignoring that the load was biologically illegal at seal.

Broker edge: The rep who can explain *why* a mix fails (with a tool link) wins trust faster than the rep who only says “carrier won’t do it.”

Suggested weekly rhythm

- Monday: origin weather + freeze alerts for sensitive lanes.
- Daily: rate snapshot check on core lanes ([Produce Truck Rate Explorer](#)).
- Every load: mix check if >1 commodity.
- Every claim: timeline reconstruction before opinion ([Perishable Claim Analyzer](#)).
- Monthly: train one WP topic with the team; link the HTML in Slack.

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FAQ

- ▶ Is this official USDA guidance?
- ▶ Can I share these with customers?
- ▶ Where are the interactive tools?

Sources & interactive tools

- [USDA AH-66 — The Commercial Storage of Fruits, Vegetables, and Florist and Nursery Stocks \(2016\)](#).
- [USDA AMS HB 669 — Protecting Perishable Foods During Transport by Truck](#)
- **Federal rules (eCFR):** [7 CFR Part 46 — PACA regulations](#) · [49 CFR Part 370 — Principles and practices for the investigation and voluntary disposition of loss and damage claims](#)
- [Cold Chain Index](#) — 200+ commodity storage/transit matrix + co-load checker
- [Produce Shipper Transit Guide](#) — dock setpoints, mix load, checklist
- [Reefer Precool Time Estimator](#) — half-cooling-time style estimator
- [Perishable Claim Analyzer](#) · [PACA Good Arrival Calculator](#) · [Produce Truck Rate Explorer](#)
- [Freight claim package checklist](#) · [Claim / Carmack deadline calculator](#)

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This publication modernizes and explains **public USDA guidance** and, where noted, points to **public federal regulations on eCFR.gov** for educational use by shippers, brokers, carriers, and operators. It is **not** an official USDA or DOT document, and it is **not** legal, insurance, PACA advocacy, food-safety certification, or professional claims advice. Always verify current commodity specifications, contracts, and the *current* eCFR text with the controlling authority and your counsel.

Primary sources: USDA-ARS Agriculture Handbook 66 (2016); USDA-AMS Handbook 669, *Protecting Perishable Foods During Transport by Truck* (1995, reprinted 2008), including Load Compatibility Groups from USDA Marketing Research Report 1070 (Lipton & Harvey, 1977). Selected federal regulation entry points: [7 CFR Part 46 \(PACA\)](#); [49 CFR Part 370 \(freight claims\)](#).

Full series

00 Cold Chain Operating System

01 The Reefer Is Not a Precooler

02 Colder Is Not Safer

03 Ethylene: The Invisible Load Killer

04 USDA Groups 1–8: The Mixed-Load Playbook

05 Airflow, Load Patterns & Multi-Temp Zones

06 Commodity Setpoint Desk Guide

07 Protein, Dairy & Eggs on the Same Trailer

08 CA, MAP & When Gas Matters

09 From Temperature Log to Claim

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