

April 14, 2004

Deborah Stern  
Attorney-Advisor  
Office of Regulations & Rulings  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Dear Ms. Stern:

I am writing on behalf of the American Spice Trade Association (ASTA) in response to your request for assistance in evaluating the proposal before the Harmonized System Committee (HSC) to distinguish cinnamon and cassia in the Harmonized Tariff System. ASTA was founded in 1907 and represents the interests of members including companies that grow, dehydrate, and process spices in the United States for domestic consumption and for export.

ASTA's members include U.S.-based agents, brokers, and importers; companies based outside of the U.S. that grow spices and ship them to the U.S.; and other companies associated with the U.S. spice industry. ASTA's members manufacture and market the vast majority of spices sold in the U.S. at retail, and to food processors. ASTA is active in research and education on spices, government relations, and trade relations.

Our members do not support the proposal to change the existing classification system. As you know, the spice industry and our customers currently recognize cassia as cinnamon. When looking at the four main species of cinnamon, they are all labeled under the family species as *cinnamomum*; *cinnamomum verum* (or *zeylanicum*), *cinnamomum cassia* Presl, *cinnamomum burmannii*, and *cinnamomum loureirii* Nees. The cinnamon in all cases comes from the bark of a tree and has an overwhelming base line similarity in appearance and flavor profile. At the same time, they all have their subtle differences; i.e. Sri Lankan Cinnamon (*C. verum*) has a very thin bark and citrusy flavor note, while the Indonesian Cinnamon (*C. burmannii*) has a thicker bark and a sweet burning flavor note.

Cinnamon is similar to other spice commodities, where there is one overriding family species covering different sub-species that are basically very similar, but have subtle differences primarily in flavor profiles. One example that comes to mind is Vanilla.

Page 2

There are two similar primary sub-species, *vanilla planifolia* and *vanilla tahitensis*. They are both very similar in physical appearance and flavor/aroma. The *V. tahitensis*, however, has a floral flavor note difference. Both sub-species are viewed in the trade and marketplace as vanilla, the same as all the different sub-species of cinnamon are considered to be cinnamon. Because of this logic, we are concerned that amending the nomenclature would create confusion in our trade.

We are not convinced that changing the classification system would be beneficial either to the industry or our customers. In fact, we are concerned that amending the HSC nomenclature could create confusion. If reasons for advancing this proposal are offered in the future we would be happy to consider them.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide additional information.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth Erman  
Executive Director