



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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FPC WELCOMES DEVELOPMENT OF ALV - BUT CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO ENSURE FULL DELIVERY OF BENEFITS FOR THE INDUSTRY

Long awaited benefits for importers and agents from simplifying procedures for importing fresh produce should be realised when the Automatic Licence Verification (ALV) system is implemented fully around January 2010. However, the industry needs urgent assurance that outstanding IT issues will be resolved well in advance in order to have confidence in the automated system when it replaces existing processes, says the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC).

FPC has pressed for these simplified and improved procedures for over two years and was instrumental in driving forward the initial pilot, in which several FPC members have been involved. ALV provides an electronic link between the Fera/RPA 'Peach' system and the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) 'CHIEF' system³. Consignment release decisions from Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate (HMI) and Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate (PHSI) Inspectors are transmitted electronically and in real time, directly into CHIEF, removing the need for agents or importers to send Quarantine Release Certificates (QRCs) or Conformity Certificates to the HMRC National Clearance Hub at Salford. This real-time update directly into CHIEF results in the customs clearance times of containers which are subject to HMI or PHSI control being reduced from the current two hours down to 10-15 minutes, once the HMI or PHSI inspection decision has been made.

“We are keen to encourage other companies to get on board with the phased roll out to take advantage of the improvements. The industry has waited long enough to have a streamlined process which is estimated to save the industry around £1 million each year,” commented Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of the FPC.

FPC would like to thank those traders who have been involved in the pilot to date, and would encourage more industry participation. FPC has requested that sufficient resource is put in place to support traders’ enquiries with the gradual incremental increase of traders using ALV.

“Given that most of the disruptions during the pilot have been due to the instability of the HMRC’s EDCS system, which passes information between CHIEF and the ALV system, we find it unacceptable that the industry will have to wait until the end of the year for guaranteed stability of this system. Our concern is that any further delay may compromise a realistic ‘go live’ date due to the failure of HMRC. At the same time we would wish to thank the project team, including Fera, for its tremendous effort and support. It is essential that the industry has a fully workable system available before a key period of major activity,” commented Nigel Jenney.

FPC continues to challenge the UK Government to remove any unnecessary burdens from companies importing fresh produce to the UK, and to ensure that the UK is a destination of choice, with fast and effective importation controls to allow highly perishable fresh produce to be enjoyed by the nation. Significant achievements by FPC on behalf of its members have included the introduction of PEACH and revision of the Plant Health legislation and its implementation, and recently a practical interpretation of the revised EU Marketing Standards.

Importers and agents can have their consignments routed through the ALV system from one of the following dates: 14 September; 12 October; 7 November 2009. Briefing sessions will be held in advance of these dates by the Project Team. For information on ALV visit: <http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/plants/plantHealth/imports/alvs.cfm> and to get involved contact: ALV-registrations@defra.gsi.gov.uk

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Notes for editors:

1. The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) is the UK's fresh produce trade association and is based in Peterborough. The FPC has represented the fresh produce sector for many years and is recognised across the UK and EU as the voice of the industry.
2. Extensive membership covers the complete spectrum of industry businesses including growers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, processors, packers, food service companies and other allied organisations.
3. The ALV process will cover goods, controlled by HMI (Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate) or PHSI (Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate) imported into England and Wales from third countries outside the European Union and indirect imports of controlled goods sourced from third countries that enter the EU via another member state prior to onward movement to England or Wales to their final destination in the UK.

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