



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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FPC secures £3 million saving for industry with deregulation coup

The Fresh Produce Consortium has secured a significant win for the fresh produce industry, with the UK Government agreeing to deregulate import procedures for reputable traders, slashing the level of checks required under the EU Marketing Standards. From 20 July 2010 under the Assured Trader Scheme registered importers can self-certify their own consignments, with the immediate release of their products at the point of importation, apart from occasional random checks.

"A change of this magnitude could only be achieved by a trade association working on behalf of individual businesses. It is the culmination of a long-term strategy by FPC in conjunction with the Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate (HMI) which will save the UK fresh produce industry significant time and cumulative costs estimated at £3 million each year," said Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of FPC. "We believe that 80 per cent of importers could be eligible to join the Assured Trader Scheme, resulting in the immediate clearance of goods under the Specific Marketing Standards. We urge importers to take up the Scheme and seize these benefits."

In addition, limited and random checks on products subject to the General Marketing Standard will also mean that just 1 per cent of produce will be selected for checks by the HMRC Chief system. A higher rate of checks will be applied only if necessary for certain products from particular countries or from particular importers based on their trading performance.

The Assured Trader Scheme is open to importers who can demonstrate that they have:

- a good level of compliance with the regulations;
- training in place for their staff;
- records of inspection carried out on their goods, showing appropriate corrective action;
- suitable facilities.

The Scheme applies to the imports of commodities subject to the Specific Marketing Standard and not to General Marketing Standard commodities. The SMS products are: apples; citrus fruit; kiwifruit; lettuces, curled leaved and broad-leaved endives; peaches and nectarines; strawberries; pears; sweet peppers; table grapes; tomatoes.

Other improvements include a more efficient and responsive risk assessment of companies within England and Wales, and standard clearer enforcement forms.

FPC has lobbied for these simplified and improved procedures for over five years, with key milestones being the introduction and development of PEACH and more recently the Automatic Licence Verification System (ALVs). These developments have moved from paper to electronic trading, providing fast track clearance following inspections where necessary, and resulted in incremental annual savings of £3 million for the industry. Without these achievements many small to medium sized businesses would have faced a mass of additional bureaucracy, costs and delays, as well as having to deal with the current economic pressures.

“The HMI deserves credit for a proactive, open relationship with the industry and for cutting out unnecessary red tape compared to other EU member states, which are suffering from the additional layers of bureaucracy and poorly thought out regulations,” said Nigel Jenney. “The HMI is an exemplar of best practice among government agencies. It’s high time other UK Government departments took up the same opportunities and recognised the high standards of reputable traders, for example, in relation to plant health controlled goods and imports of so-called ‘high risk’ products.”

FPC has lobbied the Food Standards Agency to allow the implementation of the Assured Trader Scheme under EC Regulation 669/2009 (increased controls of ‘high risk’ products),

recognising the high standards of reputable companies with independently verified records of pesticide residues monitoring. Similarly, FPC is calling on Fera to fast-track the development of the Assured Trader Scheme for plant health import inspections, reducing levels of inspection and administrative costs for reputable companies which have a long-standing record of compliance. This would allow the Government to focus its resources to target other traders or other activities as identified by inspectors.

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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. From July 2009 when the EU Marketing Standards were introduced HMI received applications for importation certificates for 42,410 consignments of fresh produce. There are around 2,000 traders currently registered to use the PEACH system, with 20 per cent accounting for 80 per cent of all the activity in a year. For details of the Assured Trader Scheme visit: www.rpa.gov.uk

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