



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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INADEQUATE FSA GUIDANCE WILL CAUSE CHAOS FOR INDUSTRY ON NEW IMPORT CONTROLS

Guidance on increased controls on so-called 'high risk' imports of certain fresh produce is belated and inadequate, says the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC), and will not provide the industry with sufficient information to comply with new EU regulations and continue to deliver quality fresh produce to meet its customers requirements.

The Food Standards Agency's final Guidance Notes were published on 31 December 2009, just three weeks before the implementation of the Regulation on 25 January 2010.

"Over the course of last year FPC pressed for detailed guidance well in advance of the implementation date to allow the fresh produce industry sufficient time to meet the requirements of the new Regulation. To receive incomplete guidance at this stage is wholly unacceptable," said Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of FPC.

The Food Standards Agency has failed to address key points raised by FPC, including the duplication of pre-notification of imports with additional costs and effort by the industry; disruption and delays affecting importers/agents pending completion of checks; and the cost to the industry to cover imposed inspection charges, sampling and residue testing, additional storage costs, damage and loss of products, and their disposal.

"The fresh produce industry is already required to provide prior notification and documentation for imports of fresh produce. The FSA's proposed implementation means that companies will have to complete an additional Common Entry Document for the Local/Port Health Authority covering each consignment of 'high risk' product and pay them

for the privilege. This runs completely counter to the Government's objective of reducing the burden on industry regarding importation. We want to avoid unnecessary duplication and have been calling for Government departments and their agencies share information. We believe that the ALV system, which is about to be adopted by the industry, could provide this service without additional effort and costs," said Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of FPC.

"The FSA's timeframe for holding fresh produce on average 10-15 days is totally unacceptable, given the highly perishable nature of these products," added Nigel Jenney. "It will result in product being unfit for use, leading to loss of retail value of between £2-5 million each year and unnecessary wastage."

Taking the FSA's figure of ten days' additional storage, FPC estimates that the additional storage cost alone at a port, for example, to be £150,000 per annum, based on the percentage of volumes of fresh produce to be inspected (excluding administrative, inspection and sampling costs).

The Regulation introduces increased controls, as defined in Annex I of the Regulation, setting out the frequency of physical checks and pesticide residue monitoring required for certain foodstuffs from third countries. Currently the list includes bananas, mangos, yard long beans, melon bitter, Lauki, peppers and aubergines from the Dominican Republic; pears and vegetables like peppers, courgettes and tomatoes from Turkey; and vegetables including yard long beans, aubergines and brassica from Thailand.

FPC supports the objective of this Regulation to safeguard public health where a real risk is identified and agrees that the inclusion of certain products must be on the basis of sound evidence of risk guided by established criteria. There is still a lack of clarity and transparency regarding the criteria being used for inclusion of products on the Annex I list, particularly where these are not linked to alerts by the Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed.

"We believe that other member states are providing better guidance and support to their industry to meet the requirements of the Regulation. We would request that any importer or agent contact FPC regarding how it affects them and their products so that we can provide a robust case with regard to the impact on UK importers," added Nigel Jenney. "We must avoid putting the UK at a disadvantage and compromising businesses and jobs."

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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 recognized 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. Around 60 per cent of fruit and vegetables are imported into the UK, providing us with produce outside the UK season as well as varieties which simply cannot be grown in the UK. Imports of fruit in 2007 were 3.5 million tonnes, and vegetable imports were 1.8 million tonnes.
4. Under the Regulation importers are required to pre-notify arrival of products at the Designated Ports of Entry (DPE) using standard documentation, a Common Entry Document (CED), sent at least one working day prior to the arrival of the consignment. Local/Port Health Authorities will be responsible for identity checks, sampling and testing at UK points of entry. Produce that needs to be checked physically will not be released until the completion of favourable laboratory tests and completion of the CED. In exceptional cases involving highly perishable products the DPE has the option to allow consignments to leave the DPE and undergo identity and physical checks at the point of destination shown on the CED. Mandatory fees will allow the authorities to recover from the importer/agent up to full costs of the checks carried out.

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