



# FPC PRESS RELEASE

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## **INCREASED IMPORT CONTROLS ARE AN UNNECESSARY BURDEN**

Increased controls on so-called 'high risk' imports of certain fresh produce will not provide additional protection for consumers and will impose additional costs and bureaucracy on importers, says the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC).

The late consultation by The Food Standards Agency (FSA) on the implementation of EC Regulation 669/2009 gives the fresh produce industry insufficient time to set in place procedures before the FSA's final guidance is published and the actual implementation of the Regulation on 25 January 2010.

FPC's key issues in response to the FSA's consultation are:

- timing of consultation and subsequent implementation of the Regulation;
- how the EU will place products on the 'high risk' list, and how they will be reviewed;
- duplication of pre-notification of imports with additional costs and effort by the industry;
- disruption and delays affecting importers/agents pending completion of checks;
- 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 ensure that unnecessary duplication is avoided by insisting that 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.

There are stringent standards in place to ensure that the UK consumer can enjoy healthy good quality fresh produce, including a rigorous testing and regulatory process for the use of pesticides. FPC believes that it is important for everyone within the fresh produce industry to ensure that they maintain high standards and follow good practice to reassure consumers that every care is taken by growers in the UK and overseas. The presence of a residue does not mean that the product is not safe to eat. Maximum Residue Levels are not

safety limits but are based on good agricultural practice and are usually well below the levels that would be a concern for people's health.

"With just eight weeks to go we are still waiting for a definitive list of Annex I products from the European Commission and for full and final guidance from the FSA on implementation in the UK," said Nigel Jenney. "We are calling on the FSA to defer the introduction of this Regulation given the lack of sufficient detail to allow the fresh produce industry to prepare fully for the impact of these controls."

The UK is an important market for many developing countries and horticultural exports are important contributors to fighting poverty in these countries. FPC believes that the UK Government should be working with others to assist developing countries in putting in place the necessary infrastructure to meet the EU's requirements, which is beyond the scope of the industry to provide.

**Ends**

**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 will be 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.
5. For a copy of FPC's response to the FSA's consultation visit: [www.freshproduce.org.uk](http://www.freshproduce.org.uk)

**Ends**

