



## FPC PRESS RELEASE

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### **FPC rejects increased plant health import inspection charges as 'unjustified'**

The Food and Environment Research Agency's (Fera) proposals to increase charges for plant health import inspections are unjustified, says the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC). The industry has been footing the bill for an incomplete service, resulting in delays in completion of checks and additional costs since 2005.

"This is a classic case of over-the-top EU red tape which fails to address the real risks of plant health and the practicalities of importing fresh produce and cut flowers in these challenging times," said Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of FPC. "The UK Government must seize this opportunity to work with the industry to target unnecessary bureaucracy and minimise cost. The Government should force the EU to see sense to adopt the Assured Trader Scheme immediately, and allow the industry to self-regulate, reducing both government and industry costs by millions of pounds."

"There should be a thorough and rigorous review of the actual level of service provided to the industry, with more reduced inspection levels reflecting the negligible risk from fresh produce," said Nigel Jenney. "Instead Fera is proposing to increase the total annual cost of plant health import charges to nearly £2.5 million, with no additional benefits to the industry."

"Less than one per cent of imported consignments in the UK have any issue. We question the need for increased inspection of fresh produce," added Nigel Jenney. "FPC is pressing for Fera to fast track the development of the Assured Trader Scheme, which would reduce

levels of inspection and administrative costs for reputable companies, recognising their consistent record of compliance and high standards.”

In 2005 the industry had to accept temporary standard charges for an incomplete service due to limited data and lack of clarity. At that time FPC called for any excess funds which were generated through the charging scheme to be returned to the industry each year, but this did not take place.

“After years of poor performance Fera has accumulated a large financial reserve, with many physical inspections not taking place but charges being levied regardless. Based on actual physical inspection levels we estimate that the industry has funded around £5 million since the inception of charging,” said Nigel Jenney. “FPC wants the industry to be reimbursed where no inspections have taken place.”

Fera has stated that the increased charges are required to reflect changes in the sterling/Euro exchange rate. The charges relate to products which require a phytosanitary certificate, and include documentary, identity and plant health checks.

FPC refutes the claim that increases are required to reflect changes in the exchange rate. When charges were introduced in the UK a 10 per cent factor for variability of exchange rates was imposed and for most of the period exchange rates have been favourable towards the UK, allowing Fera to generate more income. No action has been taken for non compliance by several EU member states which are not operating schemes fully, so the minimal risk of infraction is not a valid justification for increased charges.

**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 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 consultation closed on 24 June 2010. According to Fera current charges fall below the minimum level required under EU legislation and this will be an interim step pending a fuller review of plant health charges planned for later this year. On average current charges will need to increase by around 20 per cent to bring them up to the equivalent EU minimum standard. This would increase the total charge for a typical consignment from £23.82 to £28.58. Fera intends to introduce the new charges from 1 August 2010. The fuller review of plant health charges will take place in 2010, with the intention of having a full assessment of charges in place by 1 April 2011.

**Ends**