



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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INCREASED PLANT HEALTH INSPECTIONS AND CHARGES ARE A CYNICAL IMPOSITION

A massive increase in physical plant health inspections at key UK airports is a cynical imposition on the UK fresh produce industry, and will result in additional charges of at least £250,000 a year at Heathrow alone, says the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC).

FPC has taken Fera to task over its blinkered approach to meeting EU monitoring levels. In addition FPC has raised concerns about a potential failure of the PEACH system when importers and agents have to upload required documents as part of their PEACH application from 5 April.

“Given the history of Government IT launch failures we have little confidence in the ability of PEACH and associated systems to cope with the volume of uploads, resulting in failure of the system, delays in clearance of consignments and costs to importers. We understand that Fera has sought reassurances that the system will be able to cope, however, without a proper trial period, there is no guarantee of this,” said Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of FPC.

Whilst inspectors at Heathrow will be working between 06:00 -24:00 a clause in the existing UK Regulation means that they can charge an additional 50 per cent for being ‘out of hours’ for any physical inspection outside the hours of 08:30- 17:00, Monday to Friday.

“So called ‘out of hours’ charges are a harsh imposition on an industry which has only just seen a blanket increase on its plant health inspection charges in December 2010,” said Nigel Jenney. “We estimate these costs to be around a minimum of £250,000 for Heathrow alone.”

“The fresh produce industry is expected to provide a 24/7 service at no additional cost as a matter of course in order to provide a regular supply of affordable fresh produce to the consumer,” added Nigel Jenney.

“We recognise that Fera has a job to do but the risk of any plant health issues arising from fresh produce is minimal. There is already an EU-wide review of the Plant Health regime underway which may lead to the introduction of full cost recovery in due course, so why is Fera intent on imposing these ridiculous changes now and placing UK businesses at a commercial disadvantage?”

FPC is calling for current standard charges only to be applied, and for Fera to carry out 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.

With the deactivation of the auto clear mechanism importers will face additional delays in waiting for clearance of consignments if their goods arrive at the point of entry in the early hours (24:00 – 06:00) when inspectors are not working. Importers will face further delays airside as the carriers have limited resources to move consignments to make them available for inspection. FPC anticipates 20-30,000 additional inspections per year at Heathrow alone.

Fera is increasing the level of plant health inspection at key airports, initially at Heathrow and Manchester, with changes to follow at Gatwick, and other ports of entry such as Felixstowe. The changes in plant health inspections are due to come into force at Heathrow and Manchester from 1 April.

“We will continue to challenge Fera about these changes and our concerns about their impact, said Nigel Jenney. “It’s unacceptable to impose more costs and delays on the industry in order to tick the box for the European Commission. Fera should focus its resources where there are real risks and deliver a better service to importers and their agents.”

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.

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