

EU legislation: Quality standards for the marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables

Introduction

The EU quality standards for fresh fruit and vegetables are legally binding requirements which aim to ensure that the products on the market are of acceptable quality and accurately labelled. Fresh fruit and vegetables may be offered for sale only if they comply with the specified standards and produce of unsatisfactory quality is kept off the market. The quality standards are fully harmonised in the EU.

Exporters from developing countries should be aware of the existing quality standards since the responsibility for ensuring that the produce which is sold or offered for sale complies with the EC marketing quality standards lies with every fresh fruit and vegetable trader. Where the EU standards do not exist, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) or Codex standards need to be consulted for internationally accepted product standards.

Outline of the legislation



In the EU, marketing standards for quality of fruit and vegetables are laid down in **Regulation (EC) 2200/96**. The Regulation sets up a common organization of the market in fresh fruit and vegetables. The main requirement of marketing standards relate to *quality classification* and *information labelling* of the produce. The standards do not apply to processed or prepared fresh produce for instance packs of sliced carrots. The following table lists fruits and vegetables, which are subject to EC marketing standards.

Fresh fruits and vegetables subject to EC marketing standards (EC 2200/96)	
Fruits	Almonds, apples, apricots, avocados, cherries, citrus fruit, grapes, hazelnuts, kiwis, melons, oranges, papayas, peaches and nectarines, pears, plums, strawberries, walnuts, watermelons
Vegetables	Artichokes, asparagus, aubergines, beans, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, courgettes, cucumbers, garlic, lettuce, curly and escarole chicory, leeks, mushrooms (cultivated), onions, peas, spinach, sweet peppers, tomatoes, witloof chicory

Specific standards apply to the different fruits and vegetables. For all of the above listed fruits and vegetables there are Community marketing standards laid down in Regulations for individual types of fruit and vegetable. It is advisable to always check the specific product category, as products, which do not comply with the standards are not permitted in the EU. In case product is not covered by an EU quality standard the UNECE standards apply.

➔ [For more information](#) on fruit and vegetable specific Community standards please refer to the website *Fresh Quality Guide* (includes also UNECE standards) in the external links section.

Quality standards requirements

The person selling or offering produce for sale has the responsibility of ensuring that the product meets the minimum requirements of the Community marketing standards. For certain products additional requirements are required. All requirements must be always checked for individual fruit or vegetable. The following table provides a general overview of the standards.

Community Standards	Requirements
Minimum requirements	<p>Applicable for all produce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intact • Sound (products rotting or deteriorating excluded) • Clean (free of visible foreign matter) • Free from pests, damage caused by pests • Free of abnormal external moisture • Free of any foreign smell and/or taste

Uniformity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Products packed together must be of the same origin, variety or commercial class and quality
Commercial classification	<p>'Extra' class¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce of superior quality² Free of any defects with the exception of slight superficial defects provided these do not affect the general appearance and its quality Maximum 5% by number or weight of the total produce does not satisfy the requirements of the class, but meets those of Class I or exceptionally is within the tolerances of that class <p>Class I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good-quality² (well shaped and coloured, free of marks) Slight defects may be allowed Maximum 10% by number or weight of the total produce does not satisfy the requirements of the class, but meets those of Class II or exceptionally is within the tolerances of that class <p>Class II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sound marketable quality produce (satisfies minimum requirements) May present defects (healed cracks) Maximum 10% by number or weight of the total produce does not satisfy the requirements of the class, nor the minimum requirements with the exception of products affected by rotting or other deterioration rendering them unfit for consumption
Additional requirements ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sizing⁴ Tolerances Presentation⁵ Marking⁶ Official control mark⁷
Mixed consumer packs	<p>Sales of packages of a net weight of three kilograms or less may contain mixes of different types of fresh fruit and vegetables provided that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Products are of uniform quality; they must be in identical quality class Mix is not such as to mislead the consumer
Miniatures	<p>Produce marketed in the form of miniature produce (e.g. cauliflowers, courgettes, aubergines)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Size requirement does not apply

¹ Applies only to selected produce including apples, apricots, avocados, cherries, kiwifruit, lemons, mandarins, nectarines, oranges, peaches, pears, plums, clementines, tangerines, strawberries, grapes, artichokes, asparagus, beans, carrots, cauliflower, chicory, cucumbers, garlic, mushrooms, tomatoes.

² Quality characteristic of the variety or commercial type.

³ Additional requirements are always specified for individual variety of fruits and vegetables; not all of them are always required for all produce.

⁴ For instance by weight, length, diameter.

⁵ Uniformity and packaging requirements are often specified in the regulations for specific products.

⁶ See below labelling requirements.

⁷ This requirement is optional.

➡ [For more information](#) on Regulation (EC) 2200/96 fresh fruit and vegetables standards and Regulation (EC) 48/2003 on mixes in the same package please refer to the external links.

Labelling

The marking information required by the quality standards must be shown legibly in an obvious position on one side of the packaging either printed directly onto package or on a label which is an integral part of or firmly fixed to the package. For products shipped in bulk, a document accompanying the goods should be placed on obvious position inside the means of transport. The minimum requirement for marketing standards applies to all fresh fruits and vegetables. However, additional requirements are very common for the majority of produce.

Community standard	Labelling requirement
Minimum requirement	Each container or display must be clearly marked with the correct information regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety • Origin • Quality class • Net weight¹
Original packaging	Packages which constitute a sales unit to the final user or consumer at the point of purchase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum requirements apply • Must include identification information of packer or dispatcher¹ in wording <i>packaged by</i>²
Pre-packs	Offered for sale in pre-packs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum requirements apply • Net weight • Identification of packer and dispatcher² in wording <i>packaged by</i>² • Identification of seller in wording <i>packaged for</i>²
Mixed consumer packs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of each fruit or vegetable in the pack • Origin of all produce in the pack • Quality class • Identification of packer and dispatcher in wording <i>packaged by</i>²
Miniatures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mini</i> or <i>baby</i> or other term for miniature must be indicated

¹ Only for pre-packaged products; however, does not apply for pre-packaged products sold by number.

² Name and address or officially issued code.

➔ [For more information](#) on Regulation (EC) 1135/2003 on provisions concerning sizing, presentation and labelling (includes miniature) please refer to the external link.

➔ [For more information](#) on Regulation (EC) 48/2003 on mixes of different types of fresh fruit and vegetables in the same sales package please refer to the external link.

Certificate of Conformity

According to Commission **Regulation (EC) 1148/2001** on checks on conformity to the marketing standards, fresh fruit and vegetables from outside the EU require a *Certificate of Conformity* (sample in Annex I of the Regulation) before they are allowed into the EU. Products intended for processing require a *Certificate of Industrial Use* (sample in Annex II).

Exempt from the EC standards requiring Certificate of industrial Use.

The products intended for processing are not required to comply with marketing standards. Such products must be suitably labelled and accompanied by a processing certificate stating the end-use. The packaging of products intended for processing must be clearly with the words "*intended for processing*" or other equivalent wording. In case of bulk transport this indication must be given in a document accompanying the goods or on a notice placed in an obvious place inside the means of transport.

➔ [For more information](#) on Regulation (EC) 1148/2001 please refer to the external link.

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