

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
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TO: Codex Contact Points
Interested International Organizations

FROM: Secretary, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme
FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Italy

SUBJECT: **REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED DRAFT CODEX
GUIDELINES FOR THE QUALITY CONTROL OF FRESH FRUITS AND
VEGETABLES (AT STEP 3)**

DEADLINE: **30 July 2003**

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BACKGROUND

1. In considering the *draft Code of Practice for the Quality Inspection and Certification of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*, the 9th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (Mexico City, Mexico, 9-13 October 2000) recognized the importance of developing a specific code of practice for the inspection and certification of fresh fruits and vegetables while noting that most aspects contained in the main body of the draft Code were already covered by texts elaborated by the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems. However, it was noted that the Annexes to the draft Code were specific to the inspection and certification of these products. In view of this, the Committee decided to discontinue the consideration of the main body of the draft Code and inform the Executive Committee accordingly.¹

2. The Committee decided to return the Annexes I to IV of the draft Code to Step 2 for redrafting by Canada as a *proposed draft Guidelines for the Quality Control of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*. In taking this decision, it was decided that the newly redrafted text would take account of the written comments submitted at that meeting as well as texts elaborated by the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems and international organizations involved in the elaboration of texts concerning the quality inspection and certification of fresh fruits and vegetables.²

¹ ALINORM 03/3, para. 26 & App. III

² ALINORM 01/35, paras. 75-78

3. The 10th Session of the CCFFV noted that the redrafted text had taken into account those general documents elaborated by the CCFICS and other relevant international organizations involved in the elaboration of texts concerning the quality inspection and certification of fresh fruits and vegetables (i.e. ISO, OECD, UN/ECE, etc.) as well as written comments submitted at the last session of the Committee.
4. However, in view of the extensive comments received, the Committee decided to return the proposed draft Codex Guidelines for the Quality Control of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to Step 2 for redrafting by Canada on the basis of written comments submitted at the present Session. The revised proposed draft Guidelines would be subsequently circulated for comments at Step 3 and further consideration at the next session of the Committee.³
5. Governments and interested international organizations in Observer status with Codex are invited to comment at **Step 3** on the attached *proposed draft Guidelines for the Quality Control of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* as directed above.

³ ALINORM 03/35 paras. 106-108.

PROPOSED DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR THE QUALITY CONTROL OF FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

(AT STEP 3)

Fresh fruit and vegetable inspection and certification systems should be governed by the following guidelines which will ensure consistency in inspection procedures. This document provides a framework for inspecting fresh fruit and vegetables, with a view to facilitate fair trade practices while minimizing unjustified technical barriers to trade. These Guidelines should be used in conjunction with *Codex Principles for Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification* (CAC/GL 20-1995) and the *Codex Guidelines for the Exchange of Information Between Countries on Rejections of Imported Food* (CAC/GL 25-1997).

1. DEFINITIONS

Official inspection body and official certification body:¹

Official inspection bodies and official certification bodies are bodies administered by a government agency having jurisdiction empowered to perform a regulatory or enforcement function or both.

Officially recognized inspection body and officially recognized certification body: ¹

Officially recognized inspection bodies and officially recognized certification bodies are bodies which have enforcement function and have been formally approved or recognized by a government agency having jurisdiction.

Quality inspector:

Authorized person officially recognized by an Inspection and Certification Body who has appropriate and regular training enabling him/her to undertake quality inspection.

Certification:¹

Certification is the procedure by which Inspection and Certification Bodies provide written or equivalent assurance that fresh fruit and vegetables or control systems conform to the standards. The certification of fresh fruit and vegetables may be, as appropriate, based on a range of inspection activities which may include continuous online inspection, auditing of quality assurance systems, and examination of graded and packed produce.

Inspection:¹

Inspection is the examination of fresh fruit and vegetables or systems which control the quality of fresh fruit and vegetables including the grading and packing of fresh produce, in order to verify that they conform to the standards.

Standards:¹

Standards are quality criteria set down by the competent authorities relating to trade of fresh fruit and vegetables covering the conditions of fair trading.

Trader:

A trader is a buyer, broker, dealer, grower, packer, shipper, exporter, importer, wholesaler, distributor, etc.

Consignment:²

The quantity of produce dispatched or received at one time and covered by a particular contract or shipping document. The consignment may consist of one or several types of produce; it may be composed of one or several lots of fresh fruit and vegetables.

¹ Definition taken from the *Codex Principles for Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification* (CAC/GL 20-1995) and adapted for the inspection and certification of fresh fruit and vegetables.

² Definition taken from the International Standardization Organization (ISO) 874, *Fresh Fruit and Vegetables - Sampling*, and adapted for these Guidelines.

Lot:²

A stated quantity of fresh fruit and/or vegetables which has uniform characteristics with regards to:

- packer and/or dispatcher
- country of origin
- nature of the fresh fruit or vegetable
- class of the fresh fruit or vegetable
- size (if the fresh fruit or vegetables is graded according to size)
- variety or commercial type (according to the relevant provisions of the Standard)
- type of packaging and presentation.

However, if during inspection of a consignment, it is difficult to distinguish between different lots and/or the presentation of individual lots is not possible, all lots of a specific consignment may be treated as one lot if they are similar in regard to the nature of the fresh produce, packer and/or dispatcher, country of origin, class of produce, size (if the produce is graded according to size), and variety or commercial type (according to the relevant provisions of the Standard).

Sampling:²

Sampling is the act of taking a series of primary samples, of approximately equal size, taken from different positions in a lot during an inspection.

Primary sample:²

An individual unit or package taken from the lot or, in the case of bulk produce, a stated quantity taken from a single position in the lot.

Bulk sample:²

Several representative primary samples taken from the lot whose quantity is sufficient to allow the assessment of the lot with regard to all criteria.

Reduced sample:²

A representative quantity of produce obtained by reduction of the bulk sample, whose size is sufficient to allow the assessment of certain individual criteria. Several reduced samples may be taken from a bulk sample.

1. IMPLEMENTATION OF INSPECTION PROCEDURES**2.1 GENERAL REMARKS:**

The inspection should commence by assessing samples taken at random from a lot to be inspected. It is based on the principle of presumption that the quality of the samples represents the overall quality of the lot. However, in some cases, for example, for ascertaining the presence of a particular disorder of any kind, selective sampling shall be carried out. Sampling cannot then be carried out at random. Hence, before starting sampling, its purpose should be defined, i.e., the characteristics to be tested should be specified.

2.2 PLACE OF INSPECTION:

The inspection may be carried out during the grading and packing operation, at the point of dispatch, during transport, at the import point, at the wholesale market, distribution center, etc.

2.3 PREPARATION OF PRODUCE FOR SAMPLING:

The trader or his/her representative shall inform the Inspection and Certification Body whenever a consignment is available for inspection. The trader or his/her representative shall supply all information necessary for the identification of the consignment or lot to be inspected.

The consignment or lot shall be prepared for sampling in such a way that primary samples can be taken at random without hindrance or delay. This means that the applicant of an inspection should place the consignment or lot in such a manner that it is completely and readily accessible for inspection and the quality and condition of the fresh fruit and vegetables are fully disclosed. A vehicle fully loaded or partially loaded is not considered accessible. The applicant of an inspection must either completely unload the vehicle or channel a passage through the vehicle in order that an inspector can reach every primary sample randomly.

The primary samples shall be taken by the quality Inspector. If reduced samples are required, these are identified and selected by the quality inspector himself from the bulk sample.

Each lot shall be sampled separately, however if the lot is not uniform or shows damages, it shall be divided into uniform lots and each lot shall be sampled and inspected separately.

2.4 IDENTIFICATION OF LOTS AND/OR GETTING A GENERAL IMPRESSION OF THE CONSIGNMENT

The identification of lots should be carried out on the basis of their marking or other criteria. In the case of a consignment which is made up of several lots, it is necessary for the quality inspector to get a general impression of the consignment with the aid of accompanying documents or declarations concerning the consignment. He/she then determines how far the lots presented comply with the information in these documents.

If the fresh fruit and vegetables are to be or have been loaded onto a means of transport, the registration number of the latter should be used for identification of the consignment.

2.5 ASSISTANCE TO THE QUALITY INSPECTOR

The applicant for the inspection, should provide:

- a suitable facilities free from vehicular traffic or other hazards where the inspection can be done;
- a suitable grading table where produce may be inspected;
- a suitable and adequately lighted facility where produce may be inspected. The intensity of lighting is either from natural or artificial sources and the illumination is at least 540 lux at the grading table level;
- calibrated scales, when it is required by the quality inspector; and
- assistance to the quality inspector as he/she may require.

2.6 INSPECTION OF THE LOT

2.6.1 Assessment of Packaging and Presentation on the Basis of Primary Samples:

The packaging and the material used within the package should be tested for suitability and cleanliness according to the provisions of the standards. If only certain types of packaging is permitted, the quality inspector verifies whether these are being used. If the individual Standard includes provisions concerning presentation, their conformity is also verified.

2.6.2 Verification of Marking on the Basis of Primary Samples:

The quality inspector should ascertain whether the produce is marked according to the Standard. The accuracy of the marking should also be verified.

2.6.3 Sampling:

The quality inspector should determine the size of the bulk sample in such a way as to be able to assess the lot to be inspected. He/she should select the packages to be inspected or, in the case of bulk produce, the points of the lot from which primary samples should be taken.

Damaged packages shall not be selected as part of the bulk sample, they should be set aside and may, if necessary, be subject to a separate inspection.

If the quality inspector discovers after an inspection that a decision cannot be reached, he/she may take more primary samples and express the overall results as an average of the total number of primary samples.

Certain criteria, such as the stage of development and/or ripeness or the presence or absence of internal defects, may be verified on the basis of reduced samples. This procedure may be applicable when the produce is cut or destroyed. The size of the reduced samples should be restricted to the absolute minimum quantity necessary for the assessment of the lot; if, however, defects are ascertained or suspected the size of the reduced sample should not exceed 10% of the size of the bulk sample initially taken for the inspection.

The criteria on the degree of development and/or ripeness can be verified using an instrument and methods laid out in the Standard or in accordance with acceptable practices.

1. **Packaged produce**

In the case of packaged produce (wooden packages, cardboard packages, bags, etc.), the primary samples shall be taken at random, and, whenever a lot is declared unsatisfactory, it is important that the minimum number of primary samples is taken.

Table 1 - Number of packages to be taken³

Number of packages in the lot	Number of packages to be taken,
up to 100	5
101 to 300	7
301 to 500	9
501 to 1,000	10
Over 1,000	15 (minimum)

1. **Produce in bulk**

At least five primary samples shall be taken at random from each lot, corresponding, to a total mass or a total number of units as outlined in table 2. In the case of large fruit and vegetables (over 2 kg per unit) the primary samples shall consist of at least five units. If a non-conformity decision has to be pronounced, it is important that minimum quantity of units be taken.

Table 2 - Size of primary samples³

Weight of lot (in kilograms) or total number of units in the lot	Total weight of primary samples (in kilograms) or total number of units to be taken
up to 200	10
201 to 500	20
501 to 1,000	30
1,001 to 5,000	60
Over 5,000	100 (minimum)

2.7 INSPECTION OF PRODUCE:

The produce must be entirely removed from its packaging for the inspection; the quality inspector may only dispense with this requirement if the type of packaging and the form of presentation allow an inspection of the contents without unpacking the produce. The inspection of uniformity, minimum requirements, quality classes and size should be carried out on the basis of the bulk sample. In the case when defects are detected, the quality inspector should ascertain the respective percentage of the produce not in conformity with the Standard by number or weight. The results of each primary sample examined should be recorded on an official note sheet that will be attached to a copy of the inspection certificate and kept on file at an office of Inspection and Certification Body.

³ Table 1 and 2 are taken from the ISO 874, Fresh Fruit and Vegetables - Sampling. Participating country may experiment with another sampling method than the one provided, if it has previously notified its intention to the Inspection and Certification Body concerned.

2.8 REPORT OF INSPECTION RESULTS:

According to the respective legal provisions of the individual countries and depending on the results of the inspection, a report on the findings may be made in the form of a statement, i.e., an inspection certificate.

If defects are found, the trader or his/her representative must be informed about the reasons of the complaint. This information should be made according to the legal provisions of the individual countries. If the compliance of produce with the standard is possible by a change in marking, the trader or his/her representative must be informed about it.

If defects are found in produce, the percentage found not to be in conformity with the Standard must be indicated. This is not necessary if it is possible to achieve compliance with the Standard by a change in the marking of the produce.

The Inspection and Certification Body should develop and maintain a system of recording their inspection results as an official certificate should be completed for each inspection performed.

2.9 NON-CONFORMING PRODUCE:

If as a result of an inspection, it is necessary to reconditioned or re-labeled a lot of produce to bring it into compliance with a Standard, the trader or his/her representative should make the necessary arrangement for this to be carried out under the authorization of the Inspection and Certification Body.

When the non-conforming lot has been reconditioned or re-labeled, the trader or his/her representative should present it for re-inspection. The trader or his/her representative should ensure that the non-conforming lot or the reconditioned/re-labeled lot is not marketed prior to the inspection.

2.10 Appeal Inspection

In the event that the trader or his/her representative is dissatisfied with the results of the inspection, the trader or his/her representative may request an appeal inspection. An appeal inspection will be granted if the lot is: A) more than 75% of the lot is available for inspection, B) the same lot that was originally inspected, and C) fully accessible for a complete inspection. If these criteria are not met, no appeal inspection will be granted to the trader or his/her representative.

An appeal inspection could be done on permanent (i.e., not progressive) defects or on condition (i.e., progressive) defects if done within a reasonable time after the first inspection. Otherwise the appeal inspection performed on condition defects would always be different.

If the appeal inspection does not confirm the results of the original inspection, the original inspection certificate may be rendered null and void.

2.11 DECLINE IN COMMERCIAL VALUE OF PRODUCE AS OF RESULTS OF AN INSPECTION:

After the inspection, the bulk sample is put at the disposal of the trader or his/her representative.

Unless legal provisions so specify, the Inspection and Certification Body is not bound to hand back the elements of the bulk sample destroyed during the inspection.

ANNEX I

CERTIFICATE FOR THE CONFORMITY OF FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

The inspection certificate for the conformity of fresh fruit and vegetables should be issued in accordance with the *Codex Guidelines for Generic Official Certificate Formats and the Production and Issuance of Certificates* (CAC/GL 38-2001).

The following inspection certificate is a proposed format, the width of the different boxes may be adjusted to suit the needs of the different inspection conditions or country's requirements.

EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE USE OF THE INSPECTION CERTIFICATE

The following notes are intended to help inspectors to use the inspection certificate.

Box N° 1 - Name and address of the trader. It could be an importer, an exporter, a wholesaler, a distributor, a dispatcher, etc. An approved identification code issued by the Inspection and Certification Body may also be used.

Box N° 2 - Name and address of the packer as indicated on the package. If it is identical to the trader, there is no need to complete this box. An approved identification code issued by the Inspection and Certification Body may also be used. When there are several packers, enter "various".

Box N° 3 - Title or acronym of the official Inspection and Certification Body.

Box N° 4 - Name of the country where the inspection is taking place.

Box N° 5 - Name of country to which the produce is being sent to. However, if the country of final destination is not yet known at the time of inspection - particularly in the case of transport by sea or air - this entry may be replaced by the indication "unknown". Cross this box out, when the inspection is taking place at destination.

Box N° 6 - Identification of the wagon, lorry, sea container, etc. by indicating its registration number. If possible, the name of vessel when produce is shipped by sea should be entered. The date and flight number should be entered when produce is shipped by air.

Box N° 7 - Specify any national regulations related to the export or import of the produce in question.

Box N° 8 - Number and kind of packages (boxes, trays, cartons, etc.). Specification of the kind of package is optional.

Box N° 9 - Nature of produce (apples, peaches, etc.), the name of the variety or commercial type of produce (Golden Delicious, Dixired, etc.) when specified by the Standard followed by the name of the country of origin.

Box N° 10 - Specify the class: EXTRA, I or II.

Box N° 11 - Specify the total net or gross weight of the consignment as indicated on the weighing slip or consignment note.

Box N° 12 - Customs office of entry or departure: specify the place where the consignment must be cleared. This entry is optional.

Box N° 13 - Place and date of issue: place where the fresh fruit and vegetables are inspected and the date on which the certificate is issued.

Box N° 14 - Duration of the inspection certificate's validity: specify the number of days for which the inspection certificate is valid (including the day of inspection). The number of days is fixed by the national Inspection and Certification Body on the basis of criteria specific to each country (nature of produce, season, place of production, etc.).

Box N° 15 - Inspector: full name of the person who inspected the fresh fruit and vegetables.

Box N° 16 - Signature: signature of the person who inspected the fresh fruit and vegetables.

Box N° 17 - Reserved for any additional observations. The inspector should cross the box out when no observations are entered.

ANNEX II

CERTIFICATE FOR THE CONFORMITY OF FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

1. Trader		INSPECTION CERTIFICATE No. _____ This certificate is for the exclusive use of Inspection and Certification Body		
2. Packer as indicated on packages (if other than exporter)		3. Inspection and Certification Body		
		4. Country of Inspection*	5. Country of Destination	
6. Identification of transport		7. Space reserved for national regulations		
8. Packages Number (and kind**)	9. Nature of produce (variety when specified by the Standard)	10. Class	11. Total gross/net weight in kg***	
The above-mentioned Inspection and Certification Body certifies that on the basis of examination of the samples taken, the consignment above described conforms, at the time of inspection, with the standards in force.				
12. Customs office of departure **		13. Place and date of issue		
14. Duration of inspection certificate's validity **** _____ days				
15. Inspector (in block capitals)				
16. Signature _____ Stamp of Inspection and Certification Body				
17. Observations				
* When the produce is re-exported, indicate in Box 9 its origin after the nature of produce				
** Optional				
*** Delete as necessary				
**** Duration of validity to point of exit of the exporting country (including days of inspection)				