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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**

DEADLINE: **31 January 2002**

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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.
2. In view of the above, the Committee decided to discontinue the consideration of the main body of the Draft Code and inform the Executive Committee accordingly.¹
3. 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*, with the understanding that the revised document would be circulated for comments at Step 3 and further consideration by the 10th Session of the CCFFV. 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
4. Governments and interested international organizations 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.

¹ ALINORM 03/3, para. 26 & App. III

² ALINORM 01/35, paras. 75-78

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

Fresh fruits and vegetable inspection and certification systems should be governed by guidelines which will ensure consistency in inspection procedures. This document provides a framework for inspecting for fresh fruits 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 system and official certification system:¹

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

Officially recognized inspection systems and officially recognized certification systems:¹

Officially recognized inspection systems and officially recognized certification systems are systems which have been formally approved or recognized by an government agency having jurisdiction.

Quality inspector:

Authorized person of an official recognized inspection systems and official certification system who has appropriate and regular training enabling him/her to undertake quality inspection.

Certification:¹

Certification is the procedure by which officially certified bodies and officially recognized bodies provide written or equivalent assurance that foods or food control systems conform to requirements. Certification of food 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 finished products.

Inspection:¹

Inspection is the examination of food or systems for control of food and distribution including in-process and finished product testing, in order to verify that they conform to requirements.

Requirements:¹

Requirements are criteria set down by the competent authorities relating to trade in foodstuffs covering the conditions of fair trading.

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 more lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Lot:²

A stated quantity of produce presumed to be of uniform characteristics taken from the consignment, and allowing the quality of the consignment to be assessed. Uniform characteristics means:

same

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

¹ Definition taken from the *Codex Principles for Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification*.

² Taken from the International Standardization Organization (ISO) 874, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables - Sampling

Sampling:²

A series of primary sample, of approximately equal size, taken from different positions in a lot during an inspection.

Primary sample:²

A package taken from the lot or, in the case of bulk produce, a small quantity taken from a single position in the lot.

Bulk sample:²

Several representative individual 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, if necessary, 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.

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

The inspection should take place by assessing bulk samples taken at random from the lots to be inspected. It is based on the principle of presumption that the quality of the produce conforms to the quality of the bulk sample. However, in some cases, for example, for ascertaining the presence of a different disorder of any kind, selective sampling shall be carried out. Sampling cannot then be carried out a random. Hence, before sampling is commenced, 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 at the point of dispatch, during transport, or at the import point.

2.3 PREPARATION OF A LOT FOR SAMPLING:

A person who wishes to have a consignment or a lot of produce inspected, should notify, at least 24 hours in advance (48 hours if no quality inspector is in the area), the Quality Control Body that a consignment or a lot is available for inspection. The person should supply of all information necessary for the identification of the consignment or lots.

The consignment or lot shall be prepared for sampling in such as way that samples can be taken without hindrance or delay. This means that the applicant for 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 produce is fully disclosed. A vehicle fully loaded or partially loaded is not considered accessible. The applicant for the inspection must either completely unload the vehicle or channel a passage through the vehicle in order to reach every sample randomly.

The samples shall be taken by the Quality Control Body or by officially recognized bodies.

If reduced samples are required to perform more detailed inspections, these are identified and selected by the quality inspector himself from the bulk sample.

If it is not possible to distinguish between the different lots 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 type of produce, dispatcher, country of origin, quality class and, variety or commercial type, if this is provided for in the standard.

At the import stage, each lot shall be sampled separately, but if the lot shows damage due to transport, the damage portions of the lot, shall be isolated and sampled separately from the sound portions. Similarly, if the consignment is not considered by the consignee to be uniform, even if the consignor has not indicated this, it shall be divided into uniform lots and each lot shall be sampled, by agreement between buyer and seller, unless they have decided otherwise.

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 consignments which are 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 consignments. He/she then determines how far the lots presented comply with the information in these documents.

If the produce is to be or has 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 may be safely performed;
- a suitable grading table where produce may be inspected;
- a suitable and adequately lighted facility where produce may be inspected which means the lighting is either coming from natural or artificial source and that the illumination is at least 540 lux at the grading table level;
- scales, when it is required by inspection; and
- assistance to the quality inspector as he/she may require.

2.6 VERIFICATION OF THE LOT

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

The packaging, including the material used within the package should be tested for

suitability and cleanliness according to the provisions of the quality standards. If only certain types of packaging are 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 quality standards. 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 individual samples should be taken.

1) Packaged products³

In the case of packaged products (wooden packages, cardboard packages, bags, etc.), the samples shall be taken at random in accordance with table 1.

Table 1 - Number of packages to be taken

Number of similar packages in the lot	Number of packages to be taken, each constituting a primary sample
up to 100	5
101 to 300	7
301 to 500	9
501 to 1,000	10
Over 1,000	15 (min.)

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

2) Products in bulk³

At least five primary samples shall be taken at random from each lot, corresponding to a total mass or a total number of bundles as given in table 2. In the case of large fruits and vegetables (over 2 kg per unit) the primary samples shall consist of at least five units.

Table 2 - Size of primary samples

Mass of lot (in kilograms) or total number of bundles in the lot	Total mass of primary samples (in kilograms) or total number of bundles 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 (min.)

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

Certain criteria, such as the presence or absence of internal defects, may be verified on the basis of reduced samples; this applies in particular to control which destroys the trade value of the produce (e.g., hollow heart in potatoes). The size of the reduced samples should be restricted to the minimum quantity absolutely necessary for the assessment of the lot; if, however, defects are ascertained or suspected the size of the reduced sample should not exceed 10 percent of the size of the bulk sample initially taken for the inspection.

2.7 INSPECTION OF PRODUCE:

The produce has to be removed entirely 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 the officially authorized quality control body.

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., a control certificate, a complaint, etc. For the report on the inspection results, in cases of nonconformity, several lots may be taken together if these are uniform in regard to type of produce including the variety, sender, country of origin, quality class, if this is provided for in the standard.

If defects are found, the authorized person or his representative must be informed about the reasons of 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 person authorized to sell it or his/her representative must be informed about it.

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

The Quality Control 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:

The authorized person, or his/her representative should ensure that there is no shipment of the non-conforming produce.

2.10 DECLINE IN VALUE BY QUALITY CONTROL:

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

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

When an inspection has been limited to the minimum required, no compensation (unless legal provisions so specify) can be claimed from the Quality Control Body concerned if the commercial value of the produce has suffered a loss.

ANNEX I**CERTIFICATE OF QUALITY FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

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

EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE USE OF THE CONTROL CERTIFICATE

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

Box N° 1 - Name and address of the exporter or exporting firm. An identification code issued or approved by the Quality Control Body may also be used.

Box N° 2 - Name and address or identification symbol marked on the package if different from that entered in section 1; if it is identical, there is no need to complete this section. When there are several packing agents, the entry "various" may be used.

Box N° 3 - Title or acronym of the official national Quality Control Body.

Box N° 4 - Name of the producing country if the inspection takes place in that country. In the case of re-exported goods or goods of various (domestic and foreign) origins, the country of origin should be indicated in section 9, immediately after the nature of the produce; section 4 should be left blank or a line should be drawn through it.

Box N° 5 - Name of country to which the produce is being sent. 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".

Box N° 6 - Number of wagon, registration number of lorry, number of container, name of vessel (possibly indicating "by sea") or "by air".

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

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

Box N° 9 - Type of produce (apples, peaches, etc.) followed by the name of the country of origin where produce is re-exported or is of various origins (national and foreign). Name of the variety (Golden Delicious, Dixired, etc.) when specified by the standard.

Box N° 10 - Specify the quality 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 departure: specify the place where the consignment must be cleared. This entry is optional.

- Duration of validity: specify the number of days for which the certificate is valid, i.e. up to the point of departure from the exporting country (including the day of inspection). The number of days is fixed by the competent national authorities on the basis of criteria specific to each country (nature of produce, season, place of production, etc.).
- Inspector: name of the person who inspects the consignment.
- Signature: signature of the person who inspects the consignment.
- Place and date of issue: place where the goods are inspected and date on which the certificate is issued.

Box N° 13 - Reserved for any additional observations. The inspector should delete this box when no observations are entered.

CERTIFICATE OF QUALITY FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

1. Exporter or Importer		CONTROL CERTIFICATE No. _____ This certificate is for the exclusive use of Quality Control Body	
2. Packer as indicated on packing (if other than exporter)		3. Quality Control Body	
		4. Country of origin*	5. Country of destination
6. Identification of means of transport		7. Space reserved for national regulations	
8. Packages Number (and kind**)	9. Nature of produce (variety when specified by the standard)	10. Quality Class	11. Total gross/ net weight in kg***
12. The above-mentioned Quality Control Body certified that on the basis of examination by sampling the consignment referred the above conforms, at the time of inspection, with the quality standards in force.			
Customs office of departure **		Place and date of issue	
Duration of validity **** _____ days			
Inspection (in block capitals)			
Signature _____ Seal of Quality Control Body			
13. Observations			
* When the produce is re-exported, indicate 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)			

ANNEX II

**CERTIFICATE OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF NOTIFICATION
FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

CERTIFICATE OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF NOTIFICATION

Country _____			
Quality Control Body /Office _____ _____ _____			
Certificate No.			
The above inspection office certifies that (name and address of company) has notified it of the following consignment, prior to dispatch:			
Nature of produce and, where appropriate, variety	Quality class	No. of packages	Total gross/net weight in kg. ⁴
Destination _____			
Means of transport _____			
Expected date of dispatch. _____			
Date _____			
Inspector _____ (name and surname in print)			
Signature _____			
Stamp of Quality Control Body			

⁴ _____
Delete as appropriate