

European buyers' requirements: Benchmarking the fresh fruit and vegetables sector

Introduction

Your European importer or international buyer may have a set of requirements for suppliers. Environmental, consumer health and safety, quality, traceability and social issues have become increasingly important in international trade. There are regional or national laws that apply, and in addition there are a number of international standards and codes that either have to be adopted or may be adopted on a voluntary basis. Many companies have developed a Corporate Social Responsibility policy, where social issues are highlighted.

This document provides some examples of food companies' practices and their demands towards suppliers.

Policies by food industry companies

Corporate codes of practice

As a result of the consumers' growing concern about food production methods and the impact on the environment and the people involved in the production process many European food companies and supermarkets have developed codes of practice. The codes of practice usually cover the following aspects:

- Food quality: complete traceability from the field to the final consumer is required. A set of standards are established through the production chain and an audit system for verification.
- Social impact: it aims to ensure that reasonable conditions for workers are provided
- Environmentally friendly production: it requires that food is produced with a minimum damage to the environment using sustainable farming systems.

Food traceability is stipulated by EU legislation called the General Food Law.: "a producer or importer putting a product on the market in any EU country should be able to inform a food inspector within a few hours, as to the origin of all ingredients (including batch of production) and the chain of supply"

Strictly spoken, the requirements apply to food business located in the EU (including importers). Although the requirements do not apply to countries outside the EU, European importers will most likely require from suppliers in third countries that they have an accurate tracing system in place.

➔ [For more information](#) on supply chain management and traceability for food please refer to the related document.

When looking at the requirements, many of them are based on internationally used standards, i.e. labour conditions requirements are often based on ILO Conventions as environmental and quality requirements are translated into management system requirements such as ISO management systems.

➔ [For more information on](#) ILO and ISO standards please refer to the related documents.

Sector specific initiatives

The European Retailers Group (EUREP)

EUREP was founded in 1997 as an initiative of European retailers, now having a membership of over 500 companies (members include retailers, producers/farmers and associate members from the input and service side of agriculture). EUREP is committed to creating international standards for agriculture amongst others and aims to develop widely accepted standards and procedures for the global certification of Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).

EUREPGAP's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Standard is internationally recognised by European retailers. Certification to the standard ensures a good level of food safety and quality across Europe, and proves that growers are prepared to constantly improve systems to raise standards.

➡ For more information, see the related document, including links to the EUREPGAP website where all requirements and information on the members can be downloaded.

Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)

The Ethical Trading Initiative is an alliance of companies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and trade union organisations. The ETI' tries to promote and improve the implementation of corporate codes of practice which cover supply chain working conditions. ETI's primary focuses on the UK market and aims to ensure that the working conditions of workers producing for the UK market meet or exceed international labour standards.

The ETI has developed and operates with ETI Base Code (a standard for company performance) which contains nine clauses reflecting the most relevant international standards with respect to labour practices. The code includes the fresh fruit and vegetables sector, but is valid for all products traded by the UK retailers part of the initiative.

➡ For more information, see the related document on the ETI, including links to the ETI website.

Presentation of companies

The table below presents four major companies in the fresh fruit and vegetable industry. These companies have taken steps to improve environmental and social performance throughout their supply chains. This is important to know for exporters and manufacturers in developing countries who may be part of the supply chains.

- **Chiquita** is a leading international marketer and distributor of bananas and other fresh and processed food products. Recently its bananas are having the label of Rainforest Alliance on environmental and social standards.
- **Sainsbury's** is one of the UK's leading suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables and is member of the Ethical Trading Initiative and of EUREPGAP.
- **KESKO** is a Finnish chain of supermarkets which offer range of food products. KESKO is active in SA8000 and member of the Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI).
- **Coop Norden** is a part of the Coop Group¹ which is a leading retailer of fresh fruits and vegetables in Norway. Coop Norway is member of EUREPGAP.

➡ For more information on the environmental and social policy of the benchmarked companies please refer to their websites in the external links section.

Table

Supplier requirements	Chiquita	Sainsbury	KESKO	Coop Norden	Your own company
Consumer Health and Safety					
Awareness of existing national and international legislation					
Awareness of draft legislation					
Social (based on					

¹ The Coop Group comprises of the following retail concepts: Coop Norden Danmark (Denmark), Coop Norge (Norway) and Coop Norden Sverige (Sweden).

ILO)					
Occupational health and safety	✓	✓ ²	✓	✓ ³	
Child labour	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Forced labour	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Minimum wage	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Working hours	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Environment					
Environmental management system			✓ ⁴		
Recycling					
Life cycle assessment					
Chemical substances					
Other					
Monitoring & inspections of suppliers	✓	✓	✓	✓ ⁵	
Same requirements for subcontractors	✓	✓		✓	

SAI platform

SAI, Sustainable Agricultural Initiative, is a platform which was founded by three large food companies Danone, Nestle and Unilever. The initiative aims to enhance sustainable agriculture and help the industry to better cope with quality and safety problems in the field. SAI platform is currently focusing on a number of products including fruit and vegetables.

➔ [For more information](#) on SAI platform please see the related document.

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² According to the Sainsbury's Code of conduct policies and procedures for health and safety will be established which are appropriate to the industry. In the absence of legal requirements these will reflect a clear awareness of obvious hazards and a general regard for the well-being of employees. Employees shall receive regular and recorded health and safety training, and such training shall be repeated for new or reassigned workers.

³ Coop Norden requires its suppliers to establish a system to detect, avoid or respond to potential threats to health and safety of all personnel.

⁴ Kesko favours in its purchasing those suppliers that approve of Kesko's values and principles and want to act accordingly. The most reliable way for a supplier of proving that it fulfils Kesko's ethical requirements is to acquire an SA 8000 certificate from an independent certification body or another corresponding audit approved by Kesko.

⁵ Upon Coop Norden's request, the supplier must report to Coop Norden in writing its level of compliance with each of the Coop Norden standards defined in this Code of Conduct and, if full compliance has not been achieved, what measures are being taken to achieve compliance with the standards and the time frame for implementation of such measures.