

During a crisis situation, continued compliance with the minimum requirements set by the legally binding marketing standards for fresh fruit and vegetables is important in order to supply the market with produce that is of satisfactory quality and suitable for human consumption. A minimum of controls should be ensured whilst protecting inspectors and operator personnel. Quality checks must be performed for the long-term benefits of farmers, operators and consumers.

The COVID19-pandemic has shown that countries have a different approach in relation to measures that should be taken to cope with a crisis situation. In case of pandemics or disruptive events, it is up to countries to decide whether to perform quality checks.

These non-binding guidelines aim to support authorities in the implementation of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards to Fruit and Vegetables' quality controls in case of pandemics or disruptive events. They apply to export and import quality controls and address both physical and remote inspection cases.

## OECD FRUIT AND VEGETABLES SCHEME

### GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY CONTROLS IN THE EVENT OF PANDEMICS AND OTHER DISRUPTIVE EVENTS



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**OECD Guidelines for the implementation of  
quality controls in the event of pandemics  
and other disruptive events**

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# Preamble

*These non-binding guidelines aim to support authorities in the implementation of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards to Fruit and Vegetables' quality controls with respect to fruit and vegetables in case of pandemics or disruptive events.*

*National regulations and/or constraints supersede these guidelines.*

*The Guidelines refer to the Decision of the Council revising the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables [[OECD/LEGAL/0346](#)] as the "Decision" or "Decision [C(2006)95, as amended]" or the "Rules". The "Decision" can be consulted at <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0346>.*

## General remarks

This document can serve as a guide to National Inspection Services on how to proceed with conformity checks in case of pandemics or other disruptive events.

It is important to maintain conformity checks during pandemics and other disruptive events. Continued compliance with the minimum requirements set by the legally binding marketing standards for fresh fruit and vegetables is important in order to supply the market with produce that is of satisfactory quality and suitable for human consumption even during a crisis situation. In addition, consumers should be adequately informed through proper labelling of products.

National Inspection Services of exporting and importing countries should ensure a minimum level of control to guarantee compliance.

Governments should give professional guidance to ensure a safe work environment and adherence to applicable legislation in the event of a crisis.

Conformity checks should only be carried out if appropriate measures are taken to create an environment that guarantees the safety of the inspector and the operator's staff. This will ensure a climate of mutual trust between economic operators and National Inspection Services.

"Sedentary" missions and some inspection activities (e.g. documentary controls, Internet checks) can be performed remotely.

Field inspections and border controls carried out on the operator's premises, in ports and enter/exit points, should be in strict compliance with the preventive measures designed to guarantee the safety of the inspector and the economic operators.

*Risk analysis:* Inspections will be generally carried out on the basis of a risk analysis<sup>1</sup>. However:

- Physical inspections should focus, for example, on operators who are new or not well known to the services, as well as on operators with an increased risk according to the risk analysis.
- For imports, the frequency of inspections should be reduced for consignments of products accompanied by a valid certificate of conformity issued by a recognised inspection body; physical inspections of these imports will be limited to cases where the local risk analysis gives reason for physical inspections.

Priority will always be given to handling alerts and responding to complaints or reports of serious incidents. The same applies to the fight against practices of professionals who

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<sup>1</sup> For OECD guidelines on risk analysis, see <https://www.oecd.org/agriculture/fruit-vegetables/publications/oecd-guidelines-fruit-vegetables.htm>

try to take advantage of the crisis to abuse the trust of consumers and other professionals.

## Guidelines under different levels of crisis

During a crisis that could negatively affect people's health, a minimum of controls should be ensured whilst protecting inspectors and operator personnel.

### **A. When a country decides to do physical inspections**

If the national inspection service is satisfied that physical inspections are possible under the applicable safety measures<sup>2</sup>, the following should be considered.

#### ***Preparing a physical inspection***

Assess the necessity of any physical inspection and transport arrangement.

If there are travel restrictions, the inspector should have an official document allowing the inspector to travel.

When travelling is required, the prescribed safety measures should be observed:

As far as possible, public transport should be avoided, especially if multiple changes are required and there is a need to carry out several inspections in succession. When travelling by road, the vehicle should be kept ventilated.

The inspector should be knowledgeable in the observance of national safety measures and be obliged to comply with them.

The required national safety measures should be observed at the place of inspection. If the inspection is to be carried out on an operator site, the operator must confirm compliance with the national safety measures in advance.

Ensure the inspector has adequate personal protection equipment.

Ensure that hands are sanitised.

Ensure that all contact surfaces of inspection tables and other equipment are sanitised.

Take only what is necessary to the inspection site (preferably in a shoulder bag or a backpack), along with own pens and equipment.

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<sup>2</sup> Consult WHO rules [here](#) for detailed information on safety measures.

In the event that the mission requires more than one person, all should wear masks and maintain appropriate distancing.

Before starting an inspection, the inspector should ensure that the working environment is safe and in compliance with government guidelines. In addition, the inspector will comply with the safety guidelines of the operator provided that his or her own safety is not compromised as a result.

The inspector could begin the inspection with a series of questions to update the operator profile and the situation in the sector that is relevant to risk analysis. Questions may focus on the impact of the crisis on produce and revenues, on supply difficulties, logistics, or on measures taken during the crisis, e.g. use of e-commerce, conditions to resume operations.

### ***On the inspection site***

Once on site, contact the operator immediately. Respect the safety measures in place throughout the inspection.

Prescribed safety measures should be observed when meeting with operator personnel.

Contacts between the inspector and the operator personnel are to be kept to a minimum.

Where operator equipment is used, it should be properly sanitised.

Electronic documents should be used whenever possible. Where certificates must accompany goods, these certificates should be sent electronically. Where physical documents must be transferred to the inspection place, it is important to avoid cross-contamination.

Packages selected by the inspector are provided at the place of inspection. During the physical inspection, the personnel of the operator should not be in the inspection room if maintaining appropriate distancing is impossible.

## **B. When a country decides to do remote inspections**

Where inspection before customs clearance (export/import) is obligatory, and if the national legislation allows, the option to issue waivers should be considered. Where certificates need to accompany the goods, it should be considered whether these certificates could be sent electronically to the place of destination, in accordance with national requirements.

The use of digital tools should be considered (e.g. photos of documents and products).

National Inspection Services could consider giving authorisation to traders to self-inspect (e.g. sign a document) regarding compliance of the produce with the standards in place, depending on national legislations.

Where possible, operators are invited to prioritise remote procedures for notifications.

Approvals granted to operators that are due to expire could be extended temporarily until requisite physical audits can resume.

Physical audits could be replaced by digital document controls or be suspended on an exceptional basis.