Which requirements should processed fruit and vegetables comply with to be allowed on the European market?

All foods sold in Europe, including imported processed fruit and vegetables and edible nuts, must be safe for consumption. This means for example that additives must be approved, or that harmful residues in pesticides are banned. The maximum levels of pesticides changed last year. The labels of food should clearly state whether it contains allergens. European fruit juice associations have started industrial self-control of quality and food safety practices. Sustainable and ethical trading initiatives are integrating with product quality and safety requirements.

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1. Which legal and non-legal requirements must processed fruit and vegetables comply with?

When exporting to Europe you have to comply with the following legally binding requirements:

Food safety

The European Union constantly works to ensure that Europe's food supply is the safest in the world. The same standards of food safety apply to all food products regardless of whether they are imported or produced in Europe. The General Food Law is the legislative framework regulation for food safety in Europe. Around 90% of food legislation is harmonised at the European Union level.

As the United Kingdom started a process to exit the European Union, the General Food Law will be applicable in the United Kingdom until 30 March 2019.

The European Union has developed an integrated “Farm to Fork” approach covering all sectors of the food chain. This means that all food must be traceable throughout the entire supply chain and risks of contamination must be limited. To achieve this, all food business operators need to implement Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points (HACCP) system in their daily operations. Note that food business operators also include exporters from developing countries.

The monitoring and implementation of food law is done in a collaboration between national and European organisations. The General Food Law specified establishment of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). EFSA is responsible for the development of specific food safety legislation and the creation of a framework for official food controls.
The most important aspects of legislative requirements based on the General Food Law relevant for exporters from developing countries include:

- Control of food imported to the European Union
- Contaminants

**Tips:**

- Implement a HACCP system into your daily practice. Even if in your country HACCP is not an obligation, you must comply with the European food safety regulations.
- Read more about food hygiene rules and how to implement them in specific sectors on the [Guidance Platform for Food Hygiene](https://www.guidance-platform-foodhygiene.eu/).
- For a full overview of requirements for processed fruit and vegetables and edible nuts, consult the [EU Trade Helpdesk](https://ec.europa.eu/consumers/food/oac/helpdesk_en) where you can select your specific product code under chapter 07, 08 or 20.

**Official border control for food imported to the European Union**

Official food controls include regular inspections that can be carried out at import or at all further stages of marketing. In case of non-compliance with the European food legislation, individual cases are reported through the [Rapid Alert System for Food and Feeds (RASFF)](https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/rasff), which is freely accessible for the general public.

You should be aware that repeated non-compliance with the European food legislation by a particular country may lead to special import conditions or even suspension of imports from that country. This is part of a risk-based approach of the food safety authorities, which focus their resources on the products and origins that represent the highest risks for food safety.

Nevertheless, only a small part of the products imported and marketed in Europe is subject to official (physical) controls, since the first responsibility for their safety is with the commercial operators such as importers. Importers will therefore conduct most of the checks required for assuring a safe product and may also demand certification and other proof of quality and safety.


Exporters from third countries will use the single standard [Common Health Entry Document](https://ec.europa.eu/food/en/policies/official-controls) for the prior notification of exports.

In the case of repeated non-compliance of specific products originating from particular countries those can only be imported under stricter conditions. Those stricter conditions include laboratory test results for a certain percentage of shipment from specified countries. Products from countries that have shown repeated non-compliance are put on a list included in the Annex of the [Regulation on increased level of official controls on imports](https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/controls/annexes). Since July 2018 the following processed fruit and vegetables are on the stricter inspection list:

- Preserved apricots from Turkey and Uzbekistan (increased control on presence of Sulphites)
- Dried apricots from Turkey and Uzbekistan (increased control on presence of Sulphites)
- Dried lemons from Turkey (increased control for presence of Pesticide residues)
- Frozen raspberries from Serbia (increased control on presence of Norovirus)
- Frozen sweet peppers from the Dominican Republic, Egypt, India and Turkey (increased control on presence of pesticide residues)
- Frozen other peppers from the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Thailand, India, Pakistan and Vietnam (increased control on presence of pesticide residues)
- Peanut butter from Bolivia, Gambia, Madagascar, Sudan and Senegal (increased control on presence of Aflatoxins)
- Groundnuts (peanuts) from Bolivia, Gambia, Madagascar, Sudan and Senegal (increased control on presence of Aflatoxins)
- Hazelnuts from Georgia (increased control on presence of Aflatoxins)
- Pistachios from the United States (increased control on presence of Aflatoxins)
- Dried goji berries from China (increased control on presence of pesticide residues)
- Frozen okra from India and Vietnam (increased control on presence of pesticide residues)
- Preserved turnips from Lebanon and Syria (increased control on presence of rhodamine B)
- Dried peppers from Sri Lanka (increased control on presence of aflatoxins)
- Dried grapes from Turkey (increased control on presence of ochratoxin A)
- Preserved vine leaves from Turkey (increased control on presence of pesticide residues)

**Tips:**
- Work closely with the growers from whom you are sourcing products. Invest in their good agricultural practices to have full control of the supply chain.
- Consistently check the regulations on increased levels of official control on imports for your product and country as the list is updated regularly. Even if your country is not on the list, be aware of the most common contaminations for your product and implement all possible preventive measures.
- Search in the [RASFF](https://ec.europa.eu/consumers/foodrecht/rasff/) database to see examples of withdrawals from the market and the reasons behind these withdrawals.

**Contaminants**

Food contaminants are unwanted and harmful substances in food that can cause consumer illness. These substances may be present in food as a result of the various stages of its production, packaging, transport or holding or from the external environment. The European Union has taken strict and extensive measures to minimise contaminants in foodstuffs.

This [European Commission Regulation](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/en/publications officielles) sets maximum levels for certain contaminants in food products. This regulation is frequently updated and apart from the limits set for general foodstuffs there is a number of specific contaminants limits for specific products.

The most common requirements regarding contaminants in processed fruit and vegetables are the following:

**Limited use of pesticides**

The European Union has set maximum residue levels (MRLs) for pesticides in and on food products. Products containing more pesticide residues than allowed will be withdrawn from the European market. The general public is very concerned about pesticide residues. Both government organisations and non-governmental organisations frequently conduct sampling and testing, which often leads to public blaming and shaming of the industry if residues are found.

Note that in organic products the use of most pesticides is not allowed, but in practice a very low level of residues is permitted in the product, if it can be proven that this is the result of cross
contamination and not illegal use. However, the applicable limit is often a factor 10 to 100 lower than for conventional products and generally stands at 0.01 ppm.

The European Union regularly publishes a list of approved pesticides that are authorised for use in the European Union. This list is frequently updated. There were 20 changes to this list in 2018 until the month of August.

The European Union Directive on Maximum Residue Levels on Pesticides defines MRLs and should be frequently checked. MRLs apply to 315 fresh products and to the same products after processing. A general default MRL of 0.01 mg/kg applies where a pesticide is not specifically mentioned.

The level of pesticide residue accepted for a specific crop is often subject to intensive lobbying, since a limit at the default level will generally complicate its production and trade. In order to change the limit, proof will be needed that the higher level is safe for consumers.

Be aware that some European buyers may use stricter limits for pesticide residues than in official MRLs regulations. This is often the case with producers and importers of baby food such as fruit and vegetable purees and it is also common in the fresh fruit and vegetables trade. Importers of processed fruit and vegetables may opt to limit risk of non-compliance and adopt a safety margin compared to the official limit.

Tips:

- See the European Commission Pesticides Database for the latest updates. The best way to find out what MRLs currently apply is to search pesticides residues for the selected products.

- Read more about MRLs on the European Commission website on Maximum Residue Levels.

- To be prepared for potential new changes in the MRLs, read the Ongoing Reviews of MRLs in the European Union.

- Work closely with farmers to have full control of the use of pesticides in your raw materials. Engage plant protection experts who can regularly guide and advise farmers on the sustainable use of pesticides. For example with a subscription to professional weather services or with the use of agricultural weather stations, it is possible to forecast the appearance of potential pests and plant illnesses and to limit the use of pesticides.

Absence of mycotoxins

Mycotoxins are toxic substances produced by fungi commonly known as moulds. It is important to recognise that, although it is primarily food commodities that become contaminated with aflatoxins by mould growth, these toxins are very stable and survive severe processes such as heat treatment.

Control of mycotoxins is best achieved by measures designed to prevent the contamination of crops in the field and during storage, or detection and removal of contaminated material from the food supply chain. For example, colour sorting is often used to remove mouldy nuts from bulk shipments. Density segregation, mechanical separation and the removal of fines and screenings from nut shipments can also be effective measures.

The most common mycotoxin contaminations in the processed fruit and vegetables sector are aflatoxins, ochratoxin A and patulin. In 2017, RASFF issued a total of 601 notifications for nuts and dried fruits: 427 notifications for edible nuts, 145 for dried fruits, 22 for peanuts for feed, and 7 for mixtures of nuts and dried fruits. And this is only the tip of the iceberg, since most controls are
conducted by private operators and are not recorded here.

Aflatoxins are the most common mycotoxins found in edible nuts, especially in groundnuts, pistachios and hazelnuts. They are also frequently found in dried figs. Limits have been set for aflatoxins B1, B2, G1 and G2 in most edible nuts and dried fruit.

Ochratoxin A is a mycotoxin most commonly found in dried fruits, especially grapes, but also in grape juice. Ochratoxin A is not easy to prevent as its appearance is connected to climatic conditions. In 2016, there were 25 notifications of high ochratoxin A levels in dried fruit. Note that for some products, ochratoxin A limits may become stricter in the near future. However it is still too early to speak about specific changes, as no concrete proposal is currently available. Discussions have started in June 2017.

Patulin is especially associated with a range of mouldy fruits and vegetables. In particular rotting apples and figs. For different types of fruit juices limits between 10 and 50 µg/kg apply. However patulin is not a very common reason for border rejections, probably because the industry is itself monitoring this sufficiently.

During 2017 the most notified edible nuts were peanuts, with 200 notifications, followed by pistachios (113) and hazelnuts (57). By country of origin, the most frequently notified edible nuts were peanuts from China (21%), pistachios from Iran (12%) and pistachios from the USA (7%). The number of notifications for peanuts from China increased by 56% in 2017 in relation to 2016, as well as the notifications for pistachios from the USA, which had more than doubled.

As for dried fruits, dried figs (75 notifications), dried apricots (40) and dried grapes (25) were the most notified. Dried figs and dried apricots from Turkey were still the most notified, representing 47% and 27% of the total notifications respectively, followed by dried grapes from Turkey (8%). The number of notifications for dried figs, dried apricots and dried grapes from Turkey notably increased by 26%, 30% and 200% respectively, compared to the previous year.

Tips:
- Understand better growing, drying, processing and storage practices and discuss them with your suppliers. For instance, refer to the [Codex Alimentarius codes of practices](https://www.codexalimentarius.org) for prevention and reduction of aflatoxin contaminations in tree nuts, peanuts and dried figs or the [FAO guidance for prevention of aflatoxin in pistachios](https://www.fao.org). For information on safe storage and transport of processed fruit and vegetables and edible nuts go to the website of the [Transport Information Service](https://www.etsi.int). Check the sampling and analysis guidelines on the [European Commission page for food contaminants](https://ec.europa.eu). 

Limited amount of heavy metals in food

Heavy metals can occur as residues in food because of their presence in the environment, as a result of human activities such as farming, industry or car exhausts or from contamination during food processing and storage. The European Union [regulation on food contaminants](https://eur-lex.europa.eu) sets restrictions for lead (fruit, fruit juices, various kinds of vegetables), cadmium (fruit and vegetables), and mercury in food supplements and tin (canned food and beverages).

In the processed fruit and vegetables sector high lead or cadmium presence can be found in frozen fruit and vegetables, but also in colours used on glass packaging materials. Higher concentrations of tin used to be found in canned fruit and vegetables as a result of dissolution of the tin coating or tin plate. However, since tin cans now generally have other inside coatings, there are no recent
alerts of tins found in canned products.

**Tip:**
- Use expert help for the right advice on implementation of the HACCP system in your daily practices. You need to have tight control of traceability of raw ingredients and to support farmers’ growers in establishing good agricultural practices to prevent contamination of final products.

**Reducing the risk of microbiological contaminants**

The most common types of microbiological contaminants in processed fruit and vegetables are salmonella and viruses such as norovirus and Hepatitis A viruses. According to [EU legislation](https://ec.europa.eu/food/health/salmonella_en), salmonella is an important source of contamination in unpasteurised fruit and vegetable juices. It can be also present in other processed fruit and vegetable products.

Note that since March 2016, four European Union Member States have reported a total of 40 cases of a new Salmonella serotype with an antigenic formula that has never been described before. An epidemiological analytical study discovered that the source were sesame-based products imported from India. Therefore the [official border control for sesame seeds](https://ec.europa.eu/food/health/salmonella_en) and betel leaves imported from India has become stricter.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that norovirus is the most common cause of foodborne illness in Europe with close to 15 million cases each year, causing more than 400 deaths. A common source of norovirus are human hands that are not cleaned well before hand harvesting fruit and vegetables. Also, in several cases it was found that the source of norovirus were vehicles used for the transportation of animals beside transport of fruit.

The WHO estimates that there are 100,000 cases of hepatitis A infection in the European region each year, causing 200 deaths. In the fruit and vegetable processing sector, the major source of hepatitis A are infected pickers and handlers who transmit the virus to products.

**Tips:**
- Follow the most recent trends on food safety testing developments. Increased levels of quick tests on site, automation and computerisation of food safety testing methods can help you a lot in your production process. Read the news on the webpage of [European Food Safety authority (EFSA)](https://www.efsa.europa.eu) to be updated about latest food safety developments.

- Follow the [Five Keys to Safer Food Manual](https://www.who.int) published by the WHO to prevent microbiological contamination.

- Read the guidelines for [minimising the risk of microbial contamination of berries](https://www.europeanahrungery.eu) on the webpage of European Association of Fruit and Vegetables Processors.

- Keep processed fruit and vegetables at safe temperatures.

- Transport fruit and vegetables from farmers to the processing facility in clean vehicles. The same vehicles which are used for transport of fruit must not be used for the transport of animals.

- Regularly control the water you use for cleaning and processing fruit and vegetables, as infected water is one of the most common sources of microbiological contamination.
Long-term exposure to chlorate in food, particularly in drinking water, is a potential health concern for children. Since 2008, chlorate is no longer authorised for use as a pesticide in the European Union. Also, sodium chlorate may no longer be used in biocide products. The European Commission is working on setting a standard on chlorate level in food.

A main contributor to the potentially increased level of chlorate in processed fruit and vegetables is the use of chlorinated water to washing fruits or reconstitute juices from concentrates. Another source is the use of disinfection substances with chlorates. Therefore many European buyers may ask you not to use chlorinated water from public water systems but to have your own water sources.

**Limited nitrate level**

A specific maximum level of 2,000 mg NO-3/kg applies for frozen spinach.

**Concerns about glycidyl esters**

Glycerol-based products are contaminants found in vegetable oils and in smaller quantities in some processed food, such as dried preparations for soups, breakfast cereal products, some snacks and potato products. On 26 February 2018, the European Union published new maximum levels for glycidyl esters in foods for special medical purposes intended for infants and young children.

**Absence of foreign matters**

Contamination by foreign matter such as glass particles, plastic and insects is a threat when food safety procedures are not carefully followed.

**Limited levels of irradiation**

Irradiation is a way to combat microbiological contamination but its use is limited by European Union legislation for processed fruit and vegetables and edible nuts. European radiation protection legislation and radioactive contamination legislation define maximum permitted levels of radioactive contamination in food.

Although irradiation is authorised for some food ingredients, it is almost never used in the processing of fruit and vegetables. The maximum overall average absorbed radiation dose for dried fruit and vegetables can be different in some European countries. It is common for European buyers to request the issuing of level of irradiation tests for all food shipments.

**Product composition requests**

Buyers and European authorities can reject products if they have undeclared, unauthorised or too high levels of extraneous materials. There is specific legislation for additives (like colours, thickeners) and flavourings that list what E-numbers and substances are allowed to be used. If you want to add vitamins you will have to know which vitamins (see Annex I) and sources, vitamin formulations and mineral substances are allowed (see Annex II).

Additives that are authorised are listed in Annex II to the Food Additives Regulation. The authorised uses of additives are listed according to the category of food to which they may be added. Other annexes of the regulation list food enzymes, flavourings and colorants. Note that pectin derived from apple, citrus fruits or quinces, which is used in the production of jams and marmalades, is not considered to be a food additive.

Vitamins and minerals can be added to fruit juices and fruit nectars. Maximum levels have not been established yet but the European Commission is working on a proposal for those.

Food additives permitted before 20 January 2009 must go through a new risk assessment by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). The most relevant processed fruit and vegetables additives that are currently under the assessment are sorbates and sulphites. However it is difficult to say
when exactly the Commission will discuss possible changes to the maximum levels.

Product specific legislation regarding composition applies to fruit juices and fruit jams, jellies, marmalade and sweetened chestnut pureé. The Directives indicate which raw materials and additives may be used. In the processed fruit and vegetables sector problems commonly occur because of undeclared or too high content of used preservatives.

Examples of frequent problems are sulphite used as a preservative in dried fruit and coconut products, and benzoic acid in some pickled vegetable products. Another frequent problem is too high or undeclared content of food colours. Typical examples are colour E110 - Sunset Yellow used in dried candied fruit or colour E102 – tartrazine, which also gives a yellow colour and is used in condiments, spreads, pickled products and soft drinks.

**Tips:**

- Read more about additives for processed fruit and vegetables in the Food Additives Regulation under section 4.
- Use the European Commission’s Food Additives Database to check which food additives are allowed in Europe.
- Find list of vitamins and minerals and their forms that can be added to foods in Europe.
- E-numbers indicate approval by the European Union. To obtain an E-number the additive must have been fully evaluated for safety by the competent food safety authorities in the European Union. For an overview of E-numbers refer to the specifications for food additives in the annex of the Food Additive Regulation.
- Prepare in advance for the potential changes of food additives limits by checking the re-evaluation of food additives on the website of European Commission.

**Safe packaging and informative labelling**

Export packaging must be in line with the European legislation on weighting, be safe for consumer health and for the environment. Packaging made of wood or vegetable materials may be subjected to phytosanitary controls. Labelling of packed products must contain various items of information relevant to the consumer.

**Packaging requirements**

The first requirement is that content in the packaging corresponds to the indicated quantity (in weight or volume) on the label. Importers will check packaging size and weight to ensure that pre-packed products are within the limits of tolerable errors.

You will frequently be faced with buyer requirements for the use of recyclable packaging, such as cartons. This is especially relevant if the exporters aim to supply European retail chains, which often require that packaging is 100% made of ecological and recyclable materials including lids and caps.

For consumer packaging materials that come in contact with food (like cans, jars), specific health control provisions apply. Food contact materials must be manufactured so that they do not transfer their constituents to food in quantities that could endanger human health, change the composition of the food in an unacceptable way or deteriorate the taste and odour of foodstuffs.

An interesting substance to be aware of is Bisphenol A (BPA). BPA is known for its use in plastic bottles, but is also sometimes used in inner coatings of jar lids. The use of BPA is still currently
allowed, but its use is under review. The official opinion of the EU Food Safety Authority will be published in 2020.

Tips:
- Read more about legislation on packaging waste on the European Commission website
- Be informed about the German “green dot” system for the use of the symbol for recyclable packaging materials.
- Document the toxicology test for packaging materials you conducted and risk assessment you implemented to your importer. The European legislation on food contact materials is quite extensive and it is not easy to prove to your importer that your product complies with all requirements.

Labelling requirements
In the European Union, the labelling rules enable the citizens to get comprehensive information about the content and composition of food products. Labelling helps consumers to make an informed choice while purchasing their foodstuffs.

Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers defines obligations such as:

- Labelling of the energy value and the quantities of fat, saturates, carbohydrates, protein, sugars and salt.
- Presentation of allergens (like soy, nuts, gluten, lactose) for pre-packed foods (emphasis on font, style or background colour) in the list of ingredients
- Mandatory allergen information for non-pre-packed food, including in restaurants and cafes
- Minimum font size for the mandatory information of 1.2 mm

There is a possible extension of the regulation regarding compulsory labelling of the country of origin for ingredients that represent more than 50% of a food. Some of the obligations (such as the minimum font size) relate to consumer-packed products only. However, as a supplier of bulk products you will be asked to provide relevant information, for example on allergens and composition.

Tips:
- Read more on general food labelling in the EU Trade Helpdesk.
- For practical guidance on food labelling for pre-packed products see a guidance document on information about the new food labelling legislation and check the official guidance document published by European Commission on the control of compliance of nutrient values declared on a label.
- Note that the presence of allergens is becoming more and more important. The chance of cross-contamination — for example when a product is processed in a factory that also processes peanuts — is sometimes even considered to be possible at farm level.
- Read the official answers from the European Commission on the most frequently asked questions regarding Food Labelling regulation published in May 2018.
Novel foods must be authorised before entering the European market

Novel food refers to all foods that were not consumed in the European Union to a significant degree before the first Regulation on novel foods entered into force (May 1997). It also refers to food produced using new techniques and technologies, such as nanomaterials.

In 2015 this regulation was replaced by Regulation (EU) 2015/2283, thus simplifying the procedure for placing novel food of traditional use in third countries on the market. In particular, the so-called notification procedure has been skipped, thus allowing all operators to market a product once it has been initially authorised and is included in a “Union List”.

To market a novel food or ingredient, companies must apply to European country authority for authorisation, presenting the scientific information and a safety assessment report. A marketing authorisation will cover conditions of use, designation of novel food or novel food ingredient, and specification and labelling requirements.

Alternatively, a novel food or ingredient may be marketed through a simplified procedure called "notification". The European Commission prepared a guidance document to assist businesses when a product does not require authorisation.

In the processed fruit and vegetables sector novel foods frequently appear, especially in the subsector of “superfruit” ingredients. Authorised novel food includes products traditionally eaten in non-European Union countries such as noni and baobab juice, or food produced using the latest technological innovations such as high-pressure fruit juice (which is an example of a food derived from new production processes).

Tip:
- To check if your product or ingredient is authorised as novel food check a Novel Food Catalogue. Note that the list is non-exhaustive and serves as orientation on whether a product will need authorisation under the Novel Food Regulation.

2. What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Food Safety Certification as a basis for entering the European market

Although food safety certification is not obligatory under European legislation, it has become a must for almost all food European food importers. Most established European importers will not work with you if you cannot provide some type of food safety certification proof as the basis for cooperation.

The majority of European buyers will ask for Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) certification. For fruit and vegetable processors and traders, the most popular certification programmes are:

- International Featured Standards (IFS)
- British Retail Consortium Global Standards (BRC)
- Food Safety System Certification (FSSC 22000)

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and food certification systems are constantly developing. The majority of food safety certification programmes are based on existing ISO standards like ISO 22000.

Although different food safety certification systems are based on similar principles, some buyers may prefer for one specific management system. Also note that food safety certification is only a basis to start exporting to Europe, but reliable buyers will usually visit your production facilities. If you supply to big retail chains in Europe, retail chain representatives may conduct audits a few
times per year.

In the fruit juice industry, the most recent development is SGF certification, which aims to achieve more safety, quality and fair competition in the fruit juice sector through industrial self-regulation. SGF certifies fruit processing companies, packers and bottlers, traders and brokers for fruit juices, as well as transport companies and cold stores in almost 60 countries worldwide.

For raw material suppliers in developing countries operating in the fruit juice industry, an important part of the SGF certification system is called IRMA (International Raw Material Assurance). In an ideal situation for the fruit juice industry to have the whole supply chain under control, farmers should be GlobalGap certified, fruit processors should be IRMA certified, while juice bottlers should be certified by EQCS (European Quality Control System for juices and nectars).

**Tips:**

- Check which specific food safety management systems buyers in your target market most commonly request. For example British buyers often require BRC, while IFS is more common for German retailers. In any case choose a management system that is GFSI approved.

- When you decide on a food safety certification scheme, carefully check available consultants and certification bodies in your country and with your buyers. In practice, European buyers may not accept particular certification bodies if they are not familiar with them.

- Read more on the different food safety management systems on the ITC Sustainability Map.

- Please note that some big companies use electronic qualification systems, in which you register in a supplier qualification system.

### Corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Social, environmental and ethical elements of CSR in the European processed fruit and vegetables industry range from the farm and production level, through processing of fruit and vegetables, to their delivery to the final consumer.

Although for several years sustainable certification like organic and Fairtrade have created an interesting but limited niche market, mainstream conventional companies are now introducing sustainability initiatives too. This interest of big companies is expected to have a positive impact on existing Fair Trade and similar initiatives and will also encourage the use of sustainable alternatives such as UTZ, Rainforest Alliance and several others relevant to fair labour practices such as SMETA and BSCI.

Fairtrade certified products are produced with an extra focus on the social conditions in the producing areas. Product specific standards from Fairtrade International that are relevant for the processed fruit and vegetables industry focus on prepared and preserved fruit and nuts. This standard is primarily concerned with the living conditions of disadvantaged producers in developing countries, in particular small farmers and plantation or farm workers.

Fair Trade certification is becoming more complicated, including several types of certifications and types of logos that are used on the products. One new initiative is “Fair Trade and Organic”. Another new and important issue is to ensure that farmers and workers earn a sufficient income for a normal life, a so-called living wage or living income. Commonly accepted certification schemes
don’t guarantee this.

In the edible nuts sector, several large traders joined the Sustainable Nut Initiative with the objective of stimulating traceability and sustainability. Among many tools to reach this goal, the initiative provides a management information system (3S — Sustainable Supply System) to stimulate productivity and quality, creating traceability and transparency in the supply chain.

Leaders in the fruit juice industry formed The Sustainable Juice Covenant (SJC) with the global aim of making the sourcing, production and trade of fruit- and vegetable-derived juices, purees and their concentrates 100% sustainable by 2030.

With the support of the European Fruit Juice Association (AIJN), companies work together to increase social and environmental sustainability at the farm and processing stages by rolling out sustainability certifications throughout the supply chain. AIJN established the Juice CSR Platform to support, guide and inspire juice stakeholders to integrate CSR throughout the supply chain.

Tips:

- For a full overview of certification schemes in the processed fruit and vegetables sector you can consult ITC Sustainability Map.
- Review corporate social responsibility (CSR) good practice examples on the Fruit Juice CSR Platform. This platform is co-initiated by the European Fruit Juice Association (AIJN) and Sociability and is endorsed and co-funded by the European Commission.
- Get some sort of CSR related certification to become more competitive on the market. Certified companies will be more easily selected as a supplier. You can start your own assessment with the self-assessment tools of the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform, or the Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA). You can invite suppliers or farmers in your supply chain to use the same tools.
- Communicate with final consumers in Europe on an emotional level by providing specific information on the effects of your sustainable approach in your country or community.
- Familiarise yourself with the ETI base code to check what ETI members require from their suppliers. This is especially relevant if you are targeting British market.
- Do a self-assessment through the producer starter kit from BSCI website.
- Ask your farmers to fill in the Farmer Self Assessment by the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative to check how sustainable their production is.
- Consider defining and implementing your own code of conduct. This is not required by buyers, but may be a good way to show potential buyers your views on corporate responsibility. Refer to the code of practice of the Fruit Juice Association (AIJN) for inspiration. The AIJN represents a large share of the European fruit juice producers.
- Consider implementing management systems such as ISO14001 (environmental aspects), OHSAS 18001 (occupational health and safety), ISO 26000 (a comprehensive system including all social responsibility aspects) or SA 8000 (labour and working conditions). Those systems are good ways to address sustainability and possibly gain a competitive advantage. Research with your buyer whether this is appreciated.
- Invest in building a good relationship with your buyer, invite them at the production location, and go into dialogue, to build trust and a long-term relationship.
- Check the Fair Trade Standards relevant for your production, processing and trade.
3. What are the requirements for niche markets?

Fulfilling requirements for organic products give opportunities for growing organic market segment

Organic processed fruit and vegetables and edible nuts are produced and processed by natural techniques (like crop rotation, biological crop protection, green manure, compost).

The market for organic food in Europe is still growing in double digits in sales volume, making the EU the second largest market for organic products after the USA. This trend is evident in several market segments, especially as consumers look for natural food containing less or no residues of pesticides and produced in a more sustainable way, which makes people feel that they are contributing to a better world.

To market processed fruit and vegetables and edible nuts as organic in Europe, they must be grown using organic production methods according to the European legislation. Growing and processing facilities must be audited by an accredited certifier before you may put the European Union’s organic logo on your products, as well as the logo of the standard holder, for example, Soil Association in the United Kingdom and Naturland in Germany.

European Union authorities can require increased control of imported organic products from non-member states.

Note that importing organic products is only possible with an electronic certificate. A new system of electronic certificates for imports of organic products became applicable on 19 April 2017. It replaces the paper-based certificate of inspection that had been in place since 2008.

**Tips:**

- Consider investing in organic production and make a cost-benefit analysis. Organic production will often make your products more expensive, but you may be able to compensate this with higher sales prices. Demand for certified organic processed fruit and vegetables is increasing.

- Read more about the electronic certificate on inspection for imported organic products in the new European legislation.

- Try to combine organic certification with other sustainable initiatives to increase your competitiveness on the European market.

- Check the guidelines for imports of organic products into the European Union to familiarise yourself with the requirements for European traders.

- Consult the Sustainability Map database for organic labels and standards.

- Check the Guidelines on additional official controls on imported organic products. In 2017 the additional controls are suggested for organic products imported from Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Russian Federation.

Ethnic, niche markets certification

The Islamic dietary laws (Halal) and the Jewish dietary laws (Kosher) propose specific restrictions in diets. If you want to focus on Jewish or Islamic ethnical niche markets, you should consider implementation of Halal or Kosher certification schemes.
Tip:

- If you are focusing on the Jewish or Islamic market within Europe, you should become familiar with certification procedures. You can find answers from Halal or Kosher organisations such as the certification agency OU Kosher or the Halal Food Council of Europe.

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