

What requirements must fresh fruit or vegetables comply with to be allowed on the European market?

Last updated:
18 May 2022

Exporting fresh fruit and vegetables to Europe requires you to keep high standards of food safety and quality. Responsible social and environmental conduct has also become a precondition to do business, and buyers often ask for certifications as a guarantee. However, there are also opportunities to distinguish yourself by applying additional or niche market standards.

Contents of this page

1. [What are mandatory requirements?](#)
2. [What additional requirements do buyers often have?](#)
3. [What are the requirements for niche markets?](#)

1. What are mandatory requirements?

When exporting fresh fruit and vegetables to Europe, you have to comply with the requirements for food safety and product quality. For a full list of legal requirements, consult [My Trade Assistant of Access2Markets](#) of Access2Markets, where you can select your specific product code under Chapters 07 and 08.

Limited use of pesticides

According to [The Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed \(RASFF\) Annual Report 2020](#), pesticide residues were the main reason for food safety notifications for fruits and vegetables in Europe.

To avoid health and environmental risks, the European Union (EU) has set maximum residue levels (MRLs) for pesticides in and on food products. Products containing more pesticides than allowed will be withdrawn from the European market. MRLs can become stricter with new insights from Europe's food safety authorities.

Note that buyers in several Member States such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Austria use MRLs which are stricter than the MRLs laid down in European legislation. Supermarket chains maintain the highest standards and generally demand 33% to 100% of the legal MRL. The German discounter Lidl is one of the strictest, with a limit of 33% of the EU legal standard for single active substances.

For importers, it is the easiest to work with the highest (Lidl) standard to maintain flexibility. Supermarkets tend to follow their competitors, and several of them may still tighten their requirements. Some of the supermarket chains impose financial penalties when a violation of their limit is detected.

Pesticide management takes a lot of responsibility on your part as a producer or exporter. More and more buyers ask for upfront information about your pesticide spray records, and shipments are checked before they are sent to the retailer. For future business, you must take into account that your responsibility as an exporter will play an important role as retail chains put more pressure on their suppliers.

Chlorpyrifos

One of the major problems in 2020 was residues of Chlorpyrifos. Chlorpyrifos and chlorpyrifos-methyl are

insecticides used to control insect pests on a range of crops. The [EU decided not to renew the approvals of chlorpyrifos and chlorpyrifos-methyl](#). Around October 2020, the new lowered MRL became applicable both to food produced in the EU and to imports.

Tips:

Use the [EU Pesticide Database](#) to find out the MRLs that are relevant for your products. You can select your product or a pesticide and the database shows the list of associated MRLs. Always check whether your buyers have additional requirements for MRLs and pesticide use.

Apply [integrated pest management](#) (IPM) to reduce the amount of pesticide. IPM is an agricultural pest control strategy which is also part of [GLOBALG.A.P.](#) certification. It uses natural control practices such as the application of pests' natural enemies. The fewer chemicals you use, the better your marketing position will be for export to Europe.

Avoiding contaminants

Contaminants are substances which have not been intentionally added to food but which may be present as a result of the various stages of its production, packaging, transport or holding. Similar to the MRLs for pesticides, the European Union has set limits for several contaminants (see table 1). For fresh fruit and vegetables, your main concerns will be the contamination of lead, cadmium and nitrate (mainly for spinach, lettuce and rucola).

The rules for fruit and vegetables that are processed (for example, dried fruit or juices) may differ. As the regulation is also regularly updated, you must keep yourself up to date. New insights into or threats to food safety and contaminants can always lead to adjustments in the regulations.

Note that the maximum levels for fresh fruit and vegetables, in particular for cadmium, have become more specific after a revised regulation in August 2021 (see table 1).

Table 1: The current limits for lead and cadmium in fresh fruit and vegetables (January 2022)

Lead:	Maximum level (mg/kg)
• Fruit, excluding cranberries, currants, elderberries and strawberry tree fruit	0.10
• Cranberries, currants, elderberries and strawberry tree fruit	0.20
• Root and tuber vegetables (excluding salsifies, fresh ginger and fresh turmeric), bulb vegetables, flowering brassica, head brassica, kohlrabies, legume vegetables and stem vegetables	0.10
• Leafy brassica, salsify and leafy vegetables (excluding fresh herbs)	0.30

• Fruiting vegetables: sweetcorn	0.10
• Fruiting vegetables excluding sweetcorn	0.05
• Wild fungi, fresh turmeric and fresh ginger	0.80
Cadmium:	Maximum level (mg/kg)
Fruits	
• Citrus fruits, pome fruits, stone fruits, table olives, kiwi fruits, bananas, mangoes, papayas and pineapples	0.020
• Berries and small fruits, except raspberries	0.030
• Raspberries	0.040
• Other fruits	0.050
Roots and tubers	
• Radishes	0.020
• Tropical roots and tubers, parsley roots, turnips	0.050
• Beetroots	0.060
• Celeriac	0.15
• Horseradish, parsnips, salsify	0.20
• Other root and tuber vegetables. For potatoes, the maximum level applies to peeled potatoes.	0.10
Bulb vegetables	
• Garlic	0.050
• Bulb vegetables, except garlic	0.030
Fruiting vegetables	
• Aubergines	0.030

• Fruiting vegetables, except aubergines	0.020
Brassica vegetables	
• Leafy brassica	0.10
• Brassica, other than leafy brassica	0.040
Leaf vegetables and herbs	
• Spinaches and similar leaves, mustard seedlings and fresh herbs	0.20
• Other leaf vegetables	0.10
Legume vegetables	0.020
Stem vegetables	
• Leeks	0.040
• Celeries	0.10
• Other stem vegetables	0.030
Nitrate (NO ₃):	Maximum level (mg/kg)
• Fresh spinach	3500
• Fresh Lettuce (protected and open-grown lettuce)	3,000 or 5,000 (depending on the date of harvest and growing method)
• 'Iceberg' type lettuce	2,000 or 2,500 (depending on the growing method)
• Rucola	6,000 or 7,000 (depending on the date of harvest)
Perchlorate:	Maximum level (mg/kg)
• Cucurbitaceae and kale	0.10

• leaf vegetables and herbs	0.50
• Other fruit and vegetables	0.05

Source: [REGULATION \(EC\) No 1881/2006](#)

Tips:

Maintain good contact with your buyers, because they will often keep you up to date with changes in regulation which affect the fresh fruit and vegetables business.

Read more about contaminants on the [website of the European Commission](#) and find an overview of the [maximum contaminant levels in the Annex of Regulation \(EC\) 1881/2006](#). Try to check this information on an annual basis.

Find out more about the prevention and reduction of lead contamination in the [Code of Practice](#) published by the FAO Codex Alimentarius.

Check the European Commission's fact sheet on food contaminants [Managing food contaminants: how the EU ensures that our food is safe](#).

Microbiological criteria for pre-cut fruit

When supplying pre-cut fruit and vegetables, you must take into account microbiological hazards such as Salmonella and *E. coli*. Salmonella must be absent throughout the shelf life of a freshly cut product. E.coli should be practically absent during the manufacturing process.

[European Regulation \(EC\) No 2073/2005](#) will provide you with information about testing methods, sampling plans and measuring limits.

Tip:

Make sure to maintain excellent hygiene practices in your production process to avoid microbiological contamination. Work with hygiene standards and risk assessment by [developing an HACCP plan](#). Also see the certification schemes such as BRCGS and IFS, which are based on HACCP principles, in the chapter "[What additional requirements do buyers often have](#)".

Plant health and phytosanitary regulations

Fruit and vegetables exported to the European Union must comply with European legislation on plant health. The European Union has laid down rules for the [Trade in plants & plant products from non-EU countries](#) to prevent the introduction and spread of organisms harmful to plants and plant products in Europe. These requirements are managed by the competent food safety authorities in the importing and exporting countries.

Most importantly, your home country needs to have a National Plant Protection Organization (NPPO), or [official IPPC contact point](#). Such an authority must be able to declare a region pest-free or to perform checks on specific areas and product treatments. Otherwise, you will not be allowed to export to Europe.

Most fresh fruit and vegetables are subject to health inspections and require phytosanitary certificates prior to shipping.

- A phytosanitary certificate is needed for: Most fruit and vegetables. You can find these products and their Latin names in Annex XI, Part A and Part B of [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2072](#).
- No phytosanitary certificate is needed for: Pineapple, banana, coconut, durian and dates. See Annex XI, Part C of [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2072](#).
- Special requirements are needed for: A large number of fruit and vegetables originating outside the European community, such as leafy vegetables, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, citrus fruit, stone fruit, berry fruit, apples, pears, mangoes, avocados, leaf celery and basil, among other things. Special requirements may include inspections, treatments or declarations that certain pests are absent. Root and tubercle vegetables require an official statement that the consignment or lot does not contain more than 1% by net weight of soil and growing medium. See Annex VII of [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2072](#).
- Special requirements for protected zones: are in place for certain products and regions, such as onions, carrots, potatoes, grapes (Cyprus) and citrus fruit (Malta). See Annex X of [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2072](#).
- Prohibited from entering the European Union: mainly applies for potatoes from certain origins. See Annex VI of [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2072](#).

Phytosanitary certificates are provided by plant health authorities and must guarantee that a product is:

Properly inspected;
Free from pests - free from quarantine pests; within the requirements for regulated non-quarantine pests and practically free from other pests;
In line with phytosanitary requirements - laid down in Regulation (EU) 2019/2072

Countries, authorities and exporters that are not prepared for the strict pest control will have difficulties to export their fresh fruit and vegetables to Europe. As an exporter, you must stay up to date with the rules and work closely with the food safety authority in your country.

Table 2: Overview of EU regulations concerning protective measures against pests

EU plant health regulation	REGULATION (EU) 2016/2031 on protective measures against pests of plants
IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2019/2072 establishing uniform conditions for the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2016/2031 of the European Parliament and the Council, as regards protective measures against pests of plants	

Tips:

Familiarise yourself with the phytosanitary rules to export to Europe laid out in the regulations (see table 2) and check if there are any special requirements for your product or origin.

Verify with the [National Plant Protection Organisation](#) (NPPOs) or food safety authority in your country whether and under which conditions you can export fresh fruit and vegetables to Europe. These authorities normally work with international standards, but always check with your buyer as well.

Check if all the details of your phytosanitary certificate are complete and correctly filled in. A model phytosanitary certificate can be found in Annex V of [Regulation \(EU\) 2016/2031](#).

Marketing standards

European legislation sets general and specific [marketing standards](#) for the minimum quality of fresh fruit and vegetables. A marketing standard determines the characteristics of “Extra Class”, Class I and Class II products, the minimum maturity, the different size codes, and the allowed tolerances in quality and size. Over the years, the marketing standards have been aligned with the [UNECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables](#). These standards provide guidance to businesses and generally change little.

The preferred sizes sometimes vary between the different European markets, but the quality is generally “Extra Class” or Class I. You might find a market for Class II products in some Eastern European countries, the processing industry or less formal segments.

There are specific marketing standards for the fresh fruit and vegetables listed below. You can find these in Annex I, Part B of EU Regulation No 543/2011:

- Apples
- Citrus fruit
- Kiwi fruit
- Lettuce, curly and broad-leaved endives
- Peaches and nectarines
- Pears
- Strawberries
- Sweet peppers
- Table grapes
- Tomatoes.

Fresh products that are not covered by a specific marketing standard have to comply with:

- the [general marketing standards](#) (GMS) in Annex I, Part A of EU Regulation No 543/2011; or
- the [applicable UNECE standard](#) (sometimes less strict than the EU standard).

Operators are free to choose whether to work with the EU (GMS) or UNECE standard. If your product is not covered by any specific European standard, you can also check for similar standards in the [Codex Alimentarius](#). For visual examples and interpretation of marketing standards of several fruit and vegetables, you can refer to the [OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme](#).

Conformity checks are carried out selectively by control bodies to ensure compliance with the marketing standards. These checks are based on a risk analysis and concentrate on traders most likely to have goods that do not comply with the standards. Controlled fruit and vegetables are accompanied with a certificate of conformity. An [example of a certificate of conformity](#) can be found in Annex III to EU Regulation No 543/2011. Non-EU countries may carry out their own conformity checks. Countries that are currently authorised to do their

own conformity checks include Kenya, India, Israel, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Turkey.

Imports of products intended for processing are not subject to compliance with the EU marketing standards. However, they must be clearly marked on the packaging with the words "intended for processing" or other equivalent wording.

Tips:

Be on top of quality! If you are unsure about your product, do not send it but rather look for local alternatives. If you decide to ship your product anyway, be transparent about the quality and discuss this matter beforehand with your buyer.

Check which standards are applicable to your product, and make sure that your products and the necessary documentation are in order. By filling in your export details in [My Trade Assistant](#) of Access2markets (product codes in Chapter 7 or 8), you can find the contact details of the official authorities by following the link to marketing standards under the specific import requirements.

Check out the [Codex Alimentarius](#) published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to find additional marketing standards for fresh fruits and vegetables.

Control of food imported in the European Union

To ensure food safety and avoid environmental damage, your products will be subjected to official controls. These controls are carried out to ensure that all foods marketed on the European market are safe and are in compliance with all applicable regulatory requirements.

Compulsory plant health checks are carried out on all plants and plant products coming from non-EU countries (see Annex XI, Part C of [Regulation \(EU\) 2019/2072](#)) for:

- Phytosanitary certificates and documents to ensure that the consignment meets EU requirements;
- Identity to ensure that the consignment corresponds to the certificate;
- Inspection to ensure that the consignment is free from harmful organisms.

EU countries collect a fee for the documentary, identity and plant health checks, to be paid by the importer or their customs representative. This fee is usually settled with the account of sales and final payment of the buyer.

In case of repeated non-compliance of specific products originating from particular countries, the European Union can decide to carry out more regular controls or lay down emergency measures. Controls can be carried out at all stages of import and marketing in Europe. However, most checks are done at the points of entry.

For importers of fresh fruit and vegetables, the [traceability of products](#) is compulsory. To fulfil this obligation, you must document the sources of your product, and be able to hand over [proof of origin](#) for all fruits and vegetables. Proof of origin is also necessary for importers to get beneficiary tariffs that are common for imports from developing countries with a [Generalised Scheme of Preferences \(GSP\)](#).

Figure 1: Label of oranges with traceability code



Source: European Commission - [Factsheet Food Traceability](#)

Tips:

Familiarise yourself with the procedures. See the [CBI tips for organising your export to Europe](#). Failure to follow the right procedures could decrease and delay orders, increase costs and result in actions by European enforcement authorities.

Make sure that the accompanying documents (such as a Bill of Lading) correspond exactly to the food products contained in the consignment, including indicated volumes and weight, classes and sizes, number of pallets and boxes. Check [the documents needed for customs clearance](#) in the European Union Access2Markets tool.

Check out the [Factsheet on Food Traceability of the European Commission](#).

Labelling and packaging

Food placed on the EU market must meet the legislation on food labelling. Trade packages and cartons of fresh fruit or vegetables must mention the following particulars:

- Name and address of the packer or dispatcher;
- Name and variety of the produce (if the produce is not visible from the outside of the packaging);
- Country of origin;
- Class and size (referring to the marketing standards);
- Lot number for traceability or GGN if certified GLOBALG.A.P. (recommended);
- Official control mark to replace name and address of the packer (optional);
- Post-harvest treatment; for example, anti-moulding agents added in a post-harvest treatment of citrus fruits must be mentioned on the trade package;
- Organic certification, including name of inspection body and certification number (if applicable).

Figure 2: Example of printed packaging for export



Source: OECD (2020), [Mangoes, International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables](#), OECD Publishing, Paris.

When fruit or vegetables are processed or directly packed for consumption, you must include appropriate labelling for consumers:

- Common name of the product;
- Full name of the country of origin;
- Name and address of the producer, packer, importer, brand owner or seller (retailer) in the EU who places the product on the market, and the wording "Packed for:", if applicable;
- Net content in weight;
- Minimum durability – a best-before date (on all processed fruit and vegetables, such as freshly cut);
- Producer identification or lot number;
- List of ingredients (if applicable), including additives and post-harvest treatment;
- Allergenic declaration (if applicable);
- Declaration of nutritional value (when mixed with other foodstuffs);
- Packed in protective atmosphere, if applicable;
- Additional information about quality class, size, variety or commercial type and post-harvest treatment on the product labelling or in close proximity (on the shelf) for products with specific marketing standards.

Figure 3: Example of freshly cut fruit



Source: [ICI Business](#) Figure 4: Example of pre-packaged avocados



Source: [ICI Business](#)

The European Union (EU) requires that the text on the label must be written in one of the official languages of an EU Member State and be understandable for the consumer.

Packaging marketed within Europe must comply with the general requirements and specific provisions. These aim at protecting the environment and preventing any risk to the health of consumers. The packaging must protect the product against contamination, leakage and dehydration. Also pay attention to your buyer's preference for presentation, such as individual wrapping or sortation (for example, one side up). Products and packaging should be uniform.

In the future, you can expect stricter regulations on the use of plastic in packaging. The new [EU Directive 2019/904 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment](#) already intends to limit the use of single-use plastics by transferring the cost of waste and responsibility to the producer. With the [European strategy for plastics](#), more and more buyers will demand alternative and environmentally friendly packaging.

Tips:

Use good quality packaging and strong carton. If such packaging is not available in your country, import the packaging from a foreign producer. It will raise your costs, but avoid lots of problems with importers in Europe.

Make sure that all mandatory information is mentioned, but also think of other useful information such as logos of importers or certificates. Always discuss additional requirements with your buyer.

Inform yourself well about packaging and labelling. Read more about [labelling and packaging guidelines for foodstuffs in Access2Markets](#). If your product is pre-packed for retail, check the additional requirements in [Regulation \(EU\) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers](#). For instructions on handling, packaging and transport, see the [Recommended International Code of Practice for Packaging and Transport of Tropical Fresh Fruits and Vegetables](#).

Use the [GS1 Legal Requirements for Labels on Fruit & Vegetables](#) as a guideline on legal requirements for consumer units and trade units in the European Union. This guideline provides a great overview of labelling requirements for different consumer and trade packages.

Contact [Open Trade Gate Sweden](#) if you have specific questions about the rules and requirements in Sweden and the European Union.

2. What additional requirements do buyers often have?

European buyers often have specific requirements, depending on their sales channels and product segments. Common buyer requirements include GLOBALG.A.P. certification, and compliance with social and environmental standards.

Table 3: Most important certifications requested by fresh fruit and vegetables buyers

Name of certification	Type	Cost for companies	Most used in European end-market (s)	Further Information on getting certification
-----------------------	------	--------------------	--------------------------------------	--

<p>GLOBALG.A.P.</p>	<p>Agricultural practices</p>	<p>The total cost for GLOBALG.A.P. includes your own implementation costs (improvements), the GLOBALG.A.P. registration and certificate license fee, and the service fee for the certification body.</p> <p>The GLOBALG.A.P. fee calculation is based on the standard type and production quantity. A basic GLOBALG.A.P. certification for combinable crops is usually not more than €660. The service fee for the certification bodies varies.</p> <p>Certificates are issued per product and are valid for one year.</p> <p>See the GLOBALG.A.P. General Fee Table 2021</p>	<p>Europe in general, in particular northern Europe and supermarket segments</p>	<p>Follow the 5 Steps to Get Certified</p> <p>Find an approved consultant or GLOBALG.A.P. Farm Assurer to help you implement Good Agricultural Practices</p> <p>Find your GLOBALG.A.P. Approved Certification Body (CB)</p>
---------------------	-------------------------------	---	--	---

<p>International Featured Standards (IFS)</p>	<p>Food Safety</p>	<p>The cost of certification depends on number of products, number of certification days and company size.</p> <p>The average price for the 2-day audit for SMEs and 3-5 products is usually in the range of €3,000. Additional costs include annual re-certification.</p> <p>The certificate is valid until the end of the second calendar year after the first certification date. Initial certification may include infrastructural investments (separate cost).</p>	<p>Germany, France, also recognised in many other European markets</p>	<p>More information about the process can be found on the IFS Academy portal.</p> <p>More details about the offer and costs can be found on the list of recognised Certification Bodies.</p> <p>To find consultants to prepare you for the certification you can search the IFS Consultants Database.</p> <p>Use the smart phone application IFS Audit Manager to do a self-assessment.</p>
---	--------------------	---	--	---

<p>British Retail Consortium Global Standards (BRCGS)</p>	<p>Food Safety</p>	<p>The fee depends on the company size, number of products and your role in the supply chain.</p> <p>Audit and certification costs depend on the certification body. For a small company with up to 3 products this will typically be around €3,500, excluding expenses on reading material, preparation and accommodation and travelling of the certification body. There is an annual BRCGS service fee of £625 (2021).</p> <p>The frequency of audits depends on the result you achieve. For grade B or higher, you will be audited every 12 months. For grade C, you will be audited every 6 months.</p>	<p>The UK retail market; also very common in mainland Europe</p>	<p>Read the steps how to get a Food Safety Certificate.</p> <p>To find a consultant or certification body, visit the partner sections of the BRCGS website.</p>
---	--------------------	--	--	---

<p>Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA)</p>	<p>Social audit focused on working conditions</p>	<p>Certification costs include a membership fee of £100 per production site and audit costs paid to the SMETA approved agency. The costs of the first certification are agreed with the agency and are not fixed but for most SMEs, it is around €1,000.</p>	<p>The UK Germany Most of the European buyers recognise the SMETA audit as a valid assessment</p>	<p>Check SMETA Guidance documents to become familiar with the certification process.</p>
<p>Business Social Compliance Initiative (amfori BSCI)</p>	<p>Social audit focused on working conditions</p>	<p>The certification cost is not fixed and it is agreed with the audit company. Generally, for SMEs the fee is similar to the SMETA audit costs which are around €1,000</p>	<p>Germany The Netherlands</p>	<p>Check the list of amfori BSCI auditing, training and consultancy companies to ask for an offer for your company.</p>

Rainforest Alliance	Environmental	There is no fixed fee. Request for the offer must be sent to the authorised certification body. Total cost include administrative costs, audit fees, a premium price paid to farmers, sustainability investment costs and a volume-based royalty.	Large retail chains in northwest Europe	Find the authorised certification body in the Rainforest Alliance directory to ask for the certification cost.
Fairtrade	Sustainability and ethics	Certification costs depend on the number of hired workers, products and processing plants. Fees start at around €2,000. This includes the application fee, the certification fee and the processing fee.	The United Kingdom Germany Benelux	Check Flocert Cost Calculator to make a first assessment of potential certification costs.

Organic	Sustainability, environmental	Average fees are around €1,000 for SMEs and the certificate must be renewed every year. The fee for individual farmers is considerably lower if farmers are united in an association and pay a joint fee.	European Union All European countries have their own national organic labels	Contact the EU authorised control bodies in your country to check certification costs.
---------	-------------------------------	---	---	--

Source: [Autentika Global](#), modified by [ICI Business](#)

Certification as guarantee

As food safety is a top priority in all European food sectors, you can expect most buyers to request extra guarantees from you in the form of certification. All buyers in the supply chain, such as traders, food processors and retailers, require the implementation of a food safety management system based on hazard analysis and critical control points ([HACCP](#)).

GLOBALG.A.P.

The most commonly requested certification scheme, essential for exporting fresh produce to Europe, is [GLOBALG.A.P.](#) This pre-farmgate standard covers the whole agricultural production process from before the plant is in the ground to the unprocessed product. GLOBALG.A.P. focuses on food safety as well as the environment, labour conditions and product quality. It has become a minimum standard for most European supermarkets.

Food safety management systems

In addition to GLOBALG.A.P., other food safety management systems can be required as well; for example, for the handling or processing of fresh fruit and vegetables. Almost all buyers on the north-western European market (including the UK) will require you to comply with the [BRC Global Standards](#), which are widely applied as a standard for hygiene and food safety. In Germany, the [IFS food standard](#) is very common.

Alternative food safety management certification includes the Safe Quality Food ([SQF](#)) programme and [FSSC 22000](#), an industry-developed standard developed by the International Organization for Standardization ([ISO](#)).

All the mentioned management systems are recognised by the [Global Food Safety Initiative \(GFSI\)](#), which means that they are generally accepted by the major retailers. Compliance with certification schemes varies between countries, trade channels and market situations. Buyers can be more lenient during supply shortages, but in general, you can only do business when certifications and standards are in place. Living up to these standards will only become stricter and more widespread in the future.

Tips:

Implement a food safety management system and check the [FAO Guidelines for the implementation of HACCP](#).

Check with your buyer about their preferred food safety management system and certification, which are often market-specific. At the least, become familiar with [GLOBALG.A.P.](#), as your EU market entry preparation is certain to include GLOBALG.A.P. certification.

Social and environmental compliance

There is growing attention to the social and environmental conditions in the producing areas. Most European buyers have a code of conduct, with which they will expect you to comply. Although product quality is the top priority, social compliance becomes more and more important.

Initiatives in and attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR) vary across the various parts of Europe. In the eastern part of Europe, fewer buyers require strict social compliance, while there are multinational buyers in Western Europe which have their own compliance programme. Examples include Unilever's [Sustainable Agriculture Code](#) and [Tesco's Nurture](#) accreditation. In some cases, the increasing attention to social and environmental conditions requires specific actions; for example, in water management in arid areas and in achieving 'living wages' in poor supply countries.

As an exporter you need to implement standards, especially when dealing with buyers that are linked to retail chains. The most common social standards include SMETA and GLOBALG.A.P. GRASP. These are accessible for most exporters. Rainforest Alliance is also gaining importance in supporting climate-smart agriculture and help reduce climate impacts. Fairtrade labels are not on the top of the list of buyers because of their complex requirements and high costs. Fair Trade is most often used for the largest product categories such as bananas. In the near future, you can expect new standards and buyer requirements to be introduced.

Buyer initiatives which affect you as a supplier in terms of social compliance include:

- The [IDH Sustainable Trade Initiative](#), which has a [Sustainability Initiative \[for\] Fruit and Vegetables \(SIFAV\)](#), a pan-European covenant with over 30 partners, including retailers, brands, traders and civil-society organisations. The 2025 strategy focuses on reducing the environmental footprint across the supply chain, improving working conditions, wages and incomes, and strengthening due diligence reporting and transparency.
- [Amfori BSCI](#) (Business Social Compliance Initiative) in north-western Europe, which includes a [Code of Conduct](#) for all its participants, and [amfori BEPI](#) for environmental performance;
- [Sedex](#), a non-profit membership organisation to evaluate and manage your performance on labour rights, health and safety, the environment and business ethics;
- The [Ethical Trading Initiative](#) (ETI) in the UK.

Examples of social or sustainable business standards for fresh fruit and vegetables are:

- [SMETA](#) (Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit), a social audit;
- [GLOBALG.A.P.](#), including add-ons such as [GRASP](#) for social compliance and [SPRING](#) for sustainable irrigation and groundwater use;
- [Rainforest Alliance](#), a certification that supports climate-smart agriculture and help reduce climate impacts;
- [ISO 26000](#), a standard for social responsibility and [ISO 14001](#) for Environmental management.
- [Corporate Carbon Footprint](#) of TÜV Rheinland.

The Green Deal

In the coming years, the [European Green Deal](#) will influence how resources are used and greenhouse gas

emissions are reduced. The new EU policies on sustainability will prepare Europe in becoming the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

The [Farm to Fork Strategy](#) is at the heart of the European Green Deal, aiming to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. It will ensure sustainable food production and address, for example, packaging and food waste. [EU trade agreements](#) with several countries already include rules on trade and sustainable development. For suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables, it is important to look ahead of the increasing standards and try to be ahead of the developments.

Tips:

Implement at least one environmental and one social standard. See the [Basket of Standards of The Sustainable Trade Initiative for Fruit and Vegetables \(SIFAV\)](#).

Find out about specific sourcing information of large retail chains. You can usually find these on their corporate websites, for example the [approach to sourcing fruit, vegetables and salad crops by Marks & Spencer](#).

Explore new standards. Consult the [ITC Standards Map App](#) for the different labels, and to learn about differences between social and environmental standards.

Measure your environmental impact and check your company's current performance; for example, by doing an [amfori BEPI self-assessment](#) on the amfori website.

Soft skills and company performance are also important

Complying with the food safety requirements, quality standards and certifications is a precondition to market fresh products in Europe, but it is still not a guarantee for success. Buyers look for trust and reliability and large retailers want to be unburdened. This means that your soft skills and performance are just as important as your product and certifications. Some of the most important things in the fresh trade are a timely delivery, proactive communication and commitment to agreements.

However, good conduct works both ways, so be aware of buyers that have a poor reputation or only show a short-term interest. In this fast-moving and perishable market, sudden decisions are taken, such as "dumping" your products at very low prices when the quality starts to deteriorate or when the demand slows down. European buyers are not eager to accept their loss and rather settle by claiming a quality issue. It is crucial that you can deal professionally with claims, whether they are justified or not.

Tips:

First of all, make sure that you are well organised as a company. This organisation includes maintaining good logistical planning, documenting your shipments (including proof of quality), responding to your emails within a day and being professional in every aspect of the business.

Do not put your product in consignment with a buyer which you do not know. Consignment is becoming less of a standard practice and it increases your risks significantly.

Establish and confirm agreements with your buyer on important topics such as delivery and payment terms, product specifications and certifications.

Read the [Tips for doing business with European buyers of fresh fruit and vegetables](#) on the CBI market intelligence platform.

3. What are the requirements for niche markets?

In addition to the official and common requirements, specific requirements apply to niche markets such as organic fruit and vegetables.

Organic, a growing niche market

More and more consumers in Europe prefer organic fruit and vegetables because of their natural and sustainable production methods and their connection to a healthy diet. In countries such as Italy, Ireland, France, Germany and Sweden, organic fruit and vegetables represent around a fifth of the total organic demand.

To market organic products in Europe, you have to use organic production methods according to [European legislation](#). Since January 2022, the [new organic regulation \(EU\) 2018/848](#) has come into force, laying down the rules on organic production and labelling of organic products. A number of delegated and implementing regulations foresees in the [legislation for trade in organic products](#). Inspection of organic products has become strict to prevent fraud. As a third-country producer, you will have to comply with the same set of rules as those producing in the European Union.

Before certifying your product as organic, you must have used these production methods for at least 2 years throughout a conversion period. Maintaining the required soil fertility and water retention, avoiding cross-contamination, and using organic inputs and reproductive materials can be a challenge for farmers in countries with tropical climates or with limited access to organic reproductive material and inputs.

To get certified as an organic farmer or exporter, you must be registered and certified through a recognised control body or accredited certifier. This control body is responsible for verifying that you comply with the organic rules through an annual inspection and a set of checks. After being audited by an accredited certifier, you can use the [EU organic logo](#) on your products, along with the logo of the standard holder.

European countries may prefer a national organic standard, which is in line with the EU certification but often exceeding its requirements. National standards can be an addition when supplying specific markets, for example [Naturland](#) in Germany, [KRAV](#) in Sweden, [BioSuisse](#) in Switzerland.

Figure 5: The official Organic label for organic products in Europe



Source: European Commission

All organic products imported into the EU must have the appropriate electronic certificate of inspection (e-COI). These certificates are managed through the [Trade Control and Expert System \(TRACES\)](#). If you do not have an electronic certificate of inspection, your products will not be released from their port of arrival in the European Union.

Tips:

Assess the organic market potential for your specific product. Inform yourself well, because implementing organic production and becoming certified can be expensive and time-consuming. On the European Commission's website, you can find [the current list of control bodies](#).

Find importers that specialise in organic products through trade fairs such as [Biofach](#) or [Fruit Logistica](#) and company directories such as the [International directory of organic food wholesale & supply companies](#) (Organic-bio). Organic importers often play an active role in advising and guiding

producers.

Read more about organic farming on an informative website of the [European Commission on organic farming](#), and find more information on [Trade in organics](#).

Fairtrade and environmental labels

Fairtrade and environmental product labels (visible to consumers) are niche requirements that can distinguish your product from the masses and attract the more conscious consumers. These certification labels are consumer-focused and are the most applicable to products from smallholder farms and main fruit and vegetable categories. Typical fruit varieties that can be found with these labels are bananas, pineapples and coconut, for example. Well-known labels include:

- [Fair for Life](#);
- [Fairtrade](#);
- [Rainforest Alliance](#).

Tips:


Consult the [Standards Map database](#) for a list of labels, along with their similarities and differences. Enter your product, country and destination country to find certification schemes and labels that fit your product.

Find a specialised European buyer who is familiar with these social product labels if you choose to certify your production.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [ICI Business](#).

Please review our [market information disclaimer](#).

Follow us for the latest updates

(opens in a new tab)  Twitter

(opens in a new tab)  Facebook

(opens in a new tab)  LinkedIn



RSS