



Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards**Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables****Seventieth session**

Geneva, 16-18 May 2022

Item 9 (c) of the provisional agenda

Revision of standards**Proposal by the delegation of the Netherlands to amend the Standard Layout for Standards for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables*****Submitted by the delegation of the Netherlands**

The following proposal was submitted for consideration by the Specialized Section.

This document is submitted according to ECE/CTCS/2021/2 Decision 2021-07-02 and Decision 2021-07-07, ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2021/2 paragraph 66, and A/76/6 (Sect.20).

I. Proposal to amend the Standard Layout for Standards for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables as regards physical address

To modify the provisions concerning marking as follows:

Section VI. Provisions concerning marking A. Identification

Packer and/or dispatcher/ exporter:

Name and ~~physical~~ address* (e.g. street/city/region/postal code and, if different from the country of origin, the country) or a code mark officially recognized by the national authority if the country applying such a system is listed in the UNECE data base.

[Footnote]: *The address must trace back to the physical location of the packer and/or dispatcher/exporter. The inspection authorities of the country of the packer and/or dispatcher/exporter are the designated authorities to check if the address conforms to the correct address standard of the country concerned.

* Submitted late due to secretariat resource constraints.



II. Justification

(i) Introduction

A year ago (1 March 2021), the Quality Control Bureau (KCB) of the Netherlands started strict enforcement of rejections (rejection/blocking of batches with an incorrect designation) in those cases where a Post Office (P.O.) box is indicated where a physical address is required.

The obligation of the physical address arises from European Union (EU) legislation. This legislation is based on the agricultural quality standards of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) that have been adopted into EU legislation.

(ii) Why does the Netherlands encounter an above-average number of issues relating to P.O. Box?

The Netherlands has the largest port in Europe. In the Netherlands, inspectors are trained to check the largest EU import flow (as the customs state: 40% of the import flow into the EU, with 4% of the number of people at the EU border). The Netherlands is thus often the first to encounter large and small problems. After approximately one year, the KCB evaluated the findings on physical address.

(iii) Findings

After finding addresses that do not conform to the ECE (and EU) standards, the countries of origin (the country of the packer and/or dispatcher/exporter) were contacted. When asked, in three different countries that participate in the ECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards, it emerged that P.O. box addresses is an allowable form of address by many inspection authorities. Moreover, the use of a P.O. box address seems to present no problem when it comes to traceability - on the contrary the P.O. box address is (essential) part of the company traceability system accepted by the national authorities. These countries use the same ECE (EU) standards for export. Nevertheless, we receive shipments at import from these countries where the packer / sender is indicated with P.O. box, and where the P.O. box is the formal address registered with the authorities of the country of origin (the country of the packer and/or dispatcher/exporter).

In some countries, a unique physical address does not exist. Requiring a physical address from a packer/sender in a third country where an (unique) physical address does not exist and where the government registers companies by P.O. box address risks encouraging fraud, as such companies may feel compelled to fabricate a non-existent address in order to appease the Dutch inspection authority (an address that the KCB cannot check). Mentioning a non-unique address also does not contribute to traceability systems.

(iv) Conclusions

In the past year we have come to the following conclusions.

- (a) In many situations, there is no unique physical address;
- (b) It is a particular problem with the addresses of a packer/shipper from a foreign country (outside the jurisdiction of the KCB). Dutch importers are the victims of strict enforcement of the ECE (EU) standard by the KCB without a solution at the source;
- (c) No issues have been identified with tracking and tracing from the packer and/or shipper/exporter. Further investigation shows that companies are registered with P.O. Box address at official bodies and authorities in third countries;
- (d) In addition:
 - Codex accepts P.O. Box address;

- The (EU) system TRACES New Technology (TNT)¹ accepts a P.O. box address.

The reason for indication the (physical) address on the packaging is for traceability purposes, in case of irregularities or nonconformities.

In our opinion, it must be the primary responsibility of the inspection authority of the country of origin (the country of the packer and/or dispatcher/exporter) to check the validity and traceability of the address used on labels. In case of irregularities upon import, the country of the competent authority in the origin of the product (the country of the packer and/or dispatcher/exporter) will be informed and this authority must be able to trace back the address.

For the Netherlands, as a receiving country, it is very hard (impossible) to check every nonphysical address (i.e. P.O. Box). In many cases google or google maps is used but the results are often too general, and it is not possible to locate a unique physical address (remark: Google is an open-source database and an inspection authority must not (solely) rely on Google).

As a result, inspectors make a justified rejection on the basis of the agreed standard, a decision that subsequently needs to be revoked after inquiry at the source, since the requirements as regards address in the country concerned deviates from the agreed standard. This working method is not acceptable to inspectors, as it hinders them in carrying out their task.

The Netherlands does not find it a workable situation to oblige physical address for all situations, and thus strongly advocate dropping the "physical" of a traceable identifying address.

Annex: Address examples (Address examples will be available short before the meeting only in English)

¹TRACES NT (TNT) is the European Commission's digital certification and management platform for all sanitary and phytosanitary requirements, supporting the importation of animals, animal products, food and feed of non-animal origin and plants into the European Union.
https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/agr/meetings/OtherMtgs/eQuality_June2020/TRACES_NT_-_Demo_10.06.2020.pdf