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Our ref RF100002783

Mr Paul Perrin
request-13927-d28d40fe@whatdotheyknow.com

Date 27 July 2009

Dear Mr Perrin

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: COST OF EC MARKETING STANDARDS TO UK
WHILST IN OPERATION AND QUANTITY OF FOOD REJECTED DUE TO THESE
STANDARDS**

Thank you for your request for information about EC Marketing Standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, which we received on 1 July 2009. We are dealing with your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Your request was for information on

1. the cost of the Marketing Standards to the UK while they were in operation, and
2. the quantity of food that was produced but rejected as not meeting the Standards.

You also asked whether we knew of any information held elsewhere that could assist you in finding answers to these questions.

Marketing Standards have existed in the UK for many years and since membership of the EU they have been standardised at that level. In answer to your first question, to the best of my knowledge no study has been done that has looked at the cost of the standards to the UK while they have been in operation. We did undertake an Impact Assessment as part of our recent consultation process on the revised EC Standards but this focused on our decisions in relation to implementing and enforcing the changes and many of the costs and benefits highlighted were linked to IT systems which aid our enforcement of the regime, and these have only been in place since 2005. The information you requested is therefore not held.

The objective of EC Marketing Standards is to keep products of unsatisfactory quality off the market. They also aim to ensure that produce is accurately labelled, guide production

to meet consumer requirements and facilitate trade under fair conditions. The Standards also provide a degree of consumer protection in a sector where most products are highly perishable and serious defects in the product can develop extremely rapidly. They help ensure that internal pests and disease, as well as soiling, do not affect produce, and determine whether produce is of the right maturity. They also ensure that produce is not marketed too early.

It is a common misconception that misshapen fruit and vegetables could not be sold under EC Marketing Standards. For example under Class II the variations in shape, size and colouring are more generous and there is more scope for variation in weight and size in consignments. For example bent cucumbers were allowed as Class II and even totally crooked ones could be sold if packed separately. It also allows for up to 10% of produce to be outside (worse than) Class II, providing it is not rotten. However, the revised changes introduced from 1 July this year have provided greater opportunity to allow misshapen produce to be sold.

In your second point you also query the quantity of fruit and vegetables that has been produced but rejected as not meeting these Standards. While we do not hold the precise information that you requested, the following may nevertheless be of interest to you. In 2007/08 the Rural Payments Agency Inspectorate, which enforces the EC Standards in England and Wales, inspected 196,000 tonnes of produce out of which only 2,767 tonnes were outgraded, with a further 13,435 tonnes requiring their intervention in relation to labelling defects or downgrading to bring them back into conformity with the Regulations. The majority of the outgraded produce would have gone into either the food processing or animal feed industries, with very little actually going to landfill. I should point out that supermarkets often have their own more exacting quality standards which are higher than the EC Standards so fruit and vegetables may be rejected by industry through the production chain but this is more likely to be for not meeting customer specifications rather than EC Marketing Standards. Again, however, there would be an alternative market for most of this produce.

In addition I am aware of a limited study by the Food Chain Centre that has looked at reducing waste throughout the fresh produce industry, although this did not consider Marketing Standards. It does mention premium grading but this could be grading to the higher standards of the supermarkets which would most likely still have happened in the absence of EC Standards. In addition this report considers waste as any proportion of the product not sold for the intended price i.e. final consumption, but as I have said there are various other outlets for the produce. A link to the report is:

[http://www.foodchaincentre.com/FoodChainFiles/NEW%20foodchainfiles/Cutting%20Costs%20-%20Adding%20Value%20in%20Fresh%20Produce/u\)%20Applying%20Lean%20Thinking%20to%20the%20Fresh%20Produce%20Industry.pdf](http://www.foodchaincentre.com/FoodChainFiles/NEW%20foodchainfiles/Cutting%20Costs%20-%20Adding%20Value%20in%20Fresh%20Produce/u)%20Applying%20Lean%20Thinking%20to%20the%20Fresh%20Produce%20Industry.pdf)

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) are currently undertaking a study which I believe will look at waste in the fresh produce chain but again I am not aware of how detailed this study will be. A report on the study should be available shortly via the WRAP website: <http://www.wrap.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amanda Scarfe".

Amanda Scarfe

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Annexe A

Complaints

If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request you may make a complaint or appeal against our decision within 40 working days of the date of this letter. Please write to Clive Porro, Head of Defra's Information Rights Team at, Area1B Ergon House, Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AL, (email:

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx.xxx) who will arrange for an internal review of your case.

Details of Defra's complaints procedure can be found at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/complain/info.htm>

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Please note that generally the Information Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have first exhausted Defra's own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
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