



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

PLANT HEALTH COVID-19 – LETTER TO TRADE

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Across Government and within Defra, officials are working hard to ensure vital supplies are maintained and our industries are being supported through these unprecedented times we all face.

Format of Phytosanitary certificates

We are aware of problems of obtaining original paper copies of documents and have agreed, for a limited time period, to accept electronic (PDF) copies of paper phytosanitary certificates from originating countries where issuing a hard copy is an issue. This applies to all regulated plants and plant products that require a phytosanitary certificate.

The quality of copies should allow for a comprehensive documentary check to be carried out, so in particular the content of the certificate should be clearly legible, and all attached sheets must be included with corresponding serial numbers clearly visible.

We have written to all NPPOs to inform them of this development and sets out the specific arrangements we have put in place (which is attached for reference).

Import checks of low-risk plant produce

We appreciate the demands the sector is working under and have agreed to delay the wider rollout of the 1% checks regime under the new Plant Health/Official Controls Regulations on low-risk produce from 3rd countries, until the current COVID-19 situation eases. This means these commodities, those fruit, vegetables and flowers that were newly regulated from December 2019, will continue to enter the UK without any plant health inspections as currently.

In addition, we are reviewing the inspection requirements for produce that does not fall into this 1% low risk category. We are working with APHA to reduce the inspection requirements of these commodities to further support the fresh produce sector while ensuring a high level of UK biosecurity is maintained. Our initial assessment is that this will remove several thousand checks (20k p.a. pro rata). The list of commodities subject to such arrangements will be kept under review in response to the ongoing plant health risk situation.

We will issue communications on these measures to the sector and through plant health inspectors as a matter of urgency.

HMI checks

We have agreed to temporarily suspend border inspections for consignments from countries that have Approved Inspection Service (AIS), a list of these countries can be found [here](#). This will mean that all fresh produce consignments that are sent from the 9 countries that hold AIS status will no longer be selected on a risk basis for inspection.

In addition, we are also reviewing the inspection requirements for produce that does not fall into the AIS low risk category. We will work with the Horticulture Marketing Inspectorate to ensure that only Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Standard inspections that are considered a high risk will be performed.

Organics Certification

We have agreed to accept electronic certificates of inspection (produced on Traces NT) for organic products. They must be produced before the consignment leaves the third country. The original printed and signed certificates must be presented to Port Health Authorities for endorsement when they become available.

We have written to all Ports confirming the guidance we have received from the Commission. All Port Health Authorities should release consignments where the electronic certificate of inspection has been completed and endorsed by the third country control body on TRACES NT as required by the regulations. The original certificate must then be sent as soon as possible. Consignments arriving without a COI or a COI which has not been endorsed by the control body will not be cleared as organic as there is no evidence that this consignment is organic and can be marketed as such.

For further questions, specifically in relation to plant health matters, please contact: cv19planthub@defra.gov.uk

For all other Defra related queries, please contact: DefraCovid19Comms@defra.gov.uk

Further guidance on COVID-19 measures can be found on gov.uk: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19>.