

# DRAFT SAINT LUCIA CODE OF PRACTICE

## DCP 6

### CODE OF PRACTICE — FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES — PACKAGING AND TRANSPORT

Edition 2.0

STAGE 40 — ENQUIRY STAGE – MARCH 2018

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Saint Lucia Bureau of Standards, (2018)

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The Saint Lucia Bureau of Standards was established under the Standards Act (No. 14 of 1990) and started operations on 01 April 1991. A broad-based 15-member Standards Council directs the affairs of the Bureau.

The Standards Act gives the Bureau the responsibility to develop and promote standards and codes of practice for products and services for the protection of the health and safety of consumers and the environment as well as for industrial development in order to promote the enhancement of the economy of Saint Lucia. The Bureau develops standards through consultations with relevant interest groups. In accordance with the provisions of the Standards Act, public comment is invited on all draft standards before they are declared as Saint Lucia National Standards.

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In accordance with good practice for the adoption and application of standards, Saint Lucia National Standards are subject to review every five years. Suggestions for improvements are always welcomed at any time after publication of the standard.

**CODE OF PRACTICE — FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES —  
PACKAGING AND TRANSPORT**

*AMENDMENTS ISSUED SINCE LAST PUBLICATION*

<b>Amendment no.</b>	<b>Date of issue</b>	<b>Type of amendment</b>	<b>Text(s) affected</b>

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## DRAFT SAINT LUCIA CODE OF PRACTICE

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#### CODE OF PRACTICE — FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES — PACKAGING AND TRANSPORT

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## Foreword

This code of practice is a revision of SLCP 6: 2006 Code of practice for packaging and transport of fresh fruits and vegetables. This second edition of SLCP 6 for packaging and transport of fresh fruits and vegetables was adopted by the standards council on.....

The consumption of wholesome fruits and vegetables is highly recommended and encouraged as part of the effort to reduce the risk of chronic diseases. However, the time and distance between processing and consumption may contribute to higher risks of food borne illness.

During the handling and transfer phases, mechanical damage and chemical contamination cannot be ruled out. Thus the packaging and transporting of fresh fruits and vegetables could lead to poor quality produce and consequently low buyer purchase and consumer satisfaction. These activities must therefore assure consumers and give them the confidence that consistently safe and wholesome fresh fruits and vegetables are delivered to the points of purchase.

This code of practice addresses good agricultural practices associated with the important factors of packaging and transporting of fresh fruits and vegetables. It will assist producers and suppliers of fresh fruits and vegetables in their efforts to continually improve the safety of domestic and imported fresh produce and enhance the quality of health of the population.

There is a wide range of such foods sold on the market and these have varying physical, chemical and other properties. There is also a wide range of packaging and transporting options available to accommodate the diverse needs of the market. Packers, suppliers, and consumers must understand that these will affect product quality to varying degrees. Thus it will be necessary for suppliers and distributors of fresh fruits and vegetables to use the guidance given in this code to determine the practices most appropriate to their particular operations. It will also be necessary to augment this code with educational and outreach programmes that will enable the consumer to identify the best conditions or practices that guarantee consistently good quality produce.

This code provides only general guidance on good agricultural practices related to the packaging and transporting of fresh fruits and vegetables and is not intended to cover all possible means of implementing preventative measures to assure total food quality.

In the preparation of this standard assistance was derived from:

- a) Codex Alimentarius Commission, CAC/RCP 44 – 1995, Amended 2004  
Recommended International Code of practice for packaging and Transport of tropical fresh fruit and Vegetables;
- b) SLCP 1 – 1 Code of practice for general principles of food hygiene – Food production and Processing;
- c) Tropical Products Transport Handbook, USDA, Agriculture Handbook, No. 668;
- d) International Organization for Standardization, ISO 7558: 1998 Guide to the prepacking of fruits and vegetables.

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### 1 Scope

This document gives guidelines for proper packaging and transport of fresh fruit and vegetables to be followed to maintain produce quality during transportation, handling and marketing.

### 2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated reference, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

*SLNS 1 – 1 Labelling of commodities Part 1 – General Labelling Requirements*

### 3 Terms and definition

For the purpose of this document, the following terms and definition apply.

#### 3.1 chemical

substance made from reactions involving atomic or molecular changes and is used as a reagent for producing a chemical effect

#### 3.2 condensation

process whereby a gas becomes a liquid

#### 3.3 container

any type of box, carton, bag, or bin used to form a package of produce

#### 3.4 contamination

introduction of unwanted organisms or chemicals in food, water, air, biology cultures and other substances

#### 3.5 florets

one of the numerous diminutive flowers that forms part of a composite flower

#### 3.6 foliage

a cluster of leaves, flowers or branches produced and arranged by nature

#### 3.7 hypochlorite solution

an aqueous hypochlorite solution containing 50 – 100 ppm of chlorine that is recommended for washing fruits and vegetables

NOTE In some Cases the chlorine is used in the form of hypochlorite and in some cases as chloramines.

#### 3.8 pest

any animal of public health importance including, but not limited to, birds, rodents, insects, animal larvae that may carry pathogens that contaminate food

**3.9 relative humidity**

ratio of the amount of water vapour in the air at a given temperature to the maximum it can hold at that temperature, expressed as a percentage

**3.10 respiration**

complex set of processes by which oxygen is introduced into living systems, for the oxidation of molecules to produce energy and carbon dioxide or carbonic acid is expelled as a by-product

**3.11 ripening gas**

gas, which when produced endogenously or applied exogenously, induces the ripening process in fruits

**3.12 senescence**

series of endogenously controlled deteriorative changes that result in the natural death of plant cells, tissues, organs and organisms

**3.13 sensing element**

any device that receives a signal or stimulus (as heat, pressure, light or motion, etc.) and responds to it

**3.14 toxic**

adjective applied to any substance able to cause injury to living organisms

**3.15 wilting**

to become limp or drooping due to impaired uptake of water

**4 Grading and packaging****4.1 Grading practices**

**4.1.1** To minimize mechanical damage due to handling the fresh fruits and vegetables should be cleaned and treated only when necessary by carrying out the following:

- a) wash off dirt and debris from harvest operations;
- b) discard damaged, infested, infected or decayed produce;
- c) use only approved chemicals and in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions;
- d) remove field heat by cooling as soon as possible after harvest.

NOTE The fragile nature of most fruits and vegetables makes them very susceptible to injury during handling and transporting and the complete avoidance of injury is not possible during grading of such foods.

**4.1.2** Adequate quantities of produce should be packaged in order to:

- a) minimize damage and losses;

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- b) achieve the most economical use of transport;
- c) provide easily handled and counted containers of uniform or standard size.

NOTE Economy in packaging is a desirable goal of the fresh produce industry.

### 4.1.3 To achieve these producers should:

- a) sort and package produce by size and level of maturity and buyer's specifications;
- b) package fresh produce in uniform size containers appropriate to the particular marketing system;
- c) clearly mark size, grade or weight, grower's code and date of harvest of the fresh produce on the container.

## 4.2 Requirements for packaging material

The packaging material should have the properties that provide adequate protection for produce to minimize contamination, prevent damage and accommodate proper labeling. Specific requirements for choosing the packaging material:

- a) shall be clean, non-toxic and not pose a threat to the safety and suitability of food under storage and use;
- b) should be easily transported when empty and occupy less space than when full;
- c) shall be easy to assemble, fill and close either by hand or by use of a simple machine;
- d) shall provide adequate ventilation for contents during transport and storage;
- e) should have a capacity suited to market demands;
- f) shall have dimensions and design suited to the available transport in order to load neatly and firmly;
- g) shall be cost effective in relation to the market value of the commodity for which it is used;
- h) should be readily available, preferably from more than one supplier;
- i) should meet specific requirements of purchaser.

## 4.3 Types of packaging materials

Several types of packaging materials are available on the market. These materials include:

- a) paperboard or fibreboard bins, boxes (glued, stapled, interlocking), lugs, trays, flats, dividers or partitions and slipsheets;

- b) wood bins, crates (wirebound, nailed), baskets, trays, lugs, pallets;
- c) paper bags, sleeves, wraps, liners, pads, excelsior and labels;
- d) plastic bins, boxes, trays, bags (mesh, solid), containers, sleeves, film wraps, liners, dividers and slipsheets;
- e) foam boxes, trays, lugs, sleeves, liners, dividers and pads.

#### **4.4 Packaging methods**

**4.4.1** Suitable packaging and handling techniques can reduce the amount of damage to which fresh fruits and vegetables are exposed to before they reach the market. These include:

- a) field packing – produce is placed in containers during harvest. The container is placed in the shade during the operation;
- b) shed packing – produce is packed in a packhouse or shed in a central location;
- c) repacking – produce is taken out of one container, re-graded and placed into another.

**4.4.2** Packaging shall enable the fresh fruits and vegetables to withstand damage from the following:

- a) rough handling during loading and unloading;
- b) impression from the overhead weight of other containers;
- c) impact and vibration during transportation;
- d) high humidity during pre cooling, transit and storage.

#### **4.5 Types of packs**

Packs include:

- a) volume filled – produce is placed by hand or machine into the container until the desired capacity, weight or count is reached;
- b) tray or cell pack – produce is placed in moulded trays or cells which provide separation and reduced bruising;
- c) consumer pack or prepack – relatively small amounts of produce are packaged, weighed and labelled for retail sale;
- d) film or shrink wrap produce is individually wrapped and sealed in film to reduce moisture loss and decay. The film may be treated with authorized chemicals;

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- e) modified atmosphere – individual consumer packs, shipping containers, or pallet loads of containers are sealed with plastic film or bags. The oxygen level is reduced and the carbon dioxide level is increased. This reduces produce respiration and slows the ripening process.

**4.5.1** Containers shall be sturdy enough to enable the fresh produce items resist mechanical damage and poor environmental conditions. The items shall fit well into the containers with little wasted space.

**4.5.2** Containers shall be sized and packed correctly to minimize rough handling, product damage and container failure.

NOTE 1 Over-packing causes product bruising and excessive bulging of the sides of the container giving rise to decreased compression strength and container failure.

NOTE 2 Under-packing causes product damage and the product is bruised as it moves around inside the shipping container during transport and handling.

**4.5.3** Fresh fruits and vegetables may also be transported in unit loads on pallets. Such pallets should conform to the following requirements so as to minimize damage and container failure:

- a) wood pallets must be strong enough to allow storage under load. Provisions for forklift are necessary. The design of the bottom of the pallet should not block air circulation;
- b) boxes must not overhang the edges of the pallet as this can lead to collapse of the load and make loading and unloading difficult;
- c) pallet loads which are not strapped or netted should have at least the top three layers of the containers cross-stacked to provide stability. Film wrap should not be used on shipping containers of produce that need ventilation.

## 5 Labelling

Labels shall meet the requirements of SLNS 1–1 Labelling of commodities – General requirements as well as those of the destination market for export purposes.

The following should be considered and not limited to:

- a) common name of product;
- b) net weight, count and/or volume;
- c) brand name with the name and address of the packer or shipper;
- d) country of origin;
- e) variety, size and grade;

- f) special handling instructions;
- g) name of the approved chemical(s) used in packaging.

## **6 Pre cooling of produce**

### **6.1 Pre cooling practices**

**6.1.1** Pre-cooling should occur as soon as possible after harvest. Harvesting should be done early in the morning to minimize field heat and the load on the pre cooling equipment. Harvested produce should be protected from the sun with a suitable covering until taken to the pre-cooled facility. The success of pre cooling depends on:

- a) time between harvest and pre cooling;
- b) type of shipping container if the product is packed before hand;
- c) initial product temperature;
- d) amount of cold air, water or ice provided;
- e) final product temperature;
- f) sanitation of the pre cooling air or water to reduce decay organisms;
- g) maintenance of the recommended temperature after pre cooling.

NOTE 1 Refrigerated transportation equipment is designed to maintain temperature and should not be used to remove field heat from products packed in shipping containers. The refrigeration units also are not capable of raising or controlling the relative humidity.

NOTE 2 Precooling of produce packed in shipping containers and stacked in pallet loads is especially important, as air circulation around and through the packaging may be limited during transportation and storage. Precooling is very important for products which generate a lot of heat.

### **6.2 Pre cooling methods**

**6.2.1** The choice of precooling method depends on the nature, value and quality of the produce, cost of labour, equipment and materials. They include:

- a) room cooling – stacking containers of produce in a refrigerated room;
- b) hydro cooling – flushing product in bulk tanks on shipping containers with a large quantity of cold (ice) water;
- c) packaged icing – injecting crushed ice into each container of produce;
- d) vaccum cooling removing heat from produce packed in shipping containers by drawing a vacuum in a chamber.

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**6.2.2** All produce should be precooled as near as possible to the recommended storage temperature and relative humidity. Product temperatures should be taken in sample container and the data recorded.

### 6.3 Precautions

**6.3.1** Produce should be stored at the recommended precooling temperature.

**6.3.2** All produce is sensitive to decay. Pre cooling equipment and water should be sanitized continually with a 1% **hypochlorite solution** to eliminate decay producing organisms. Care should be taken not to allow produce to warm up after pre cooling.

NOTE Condensation on cool product surfaces at higher air temperature also spreads decay.

**6.3.3** The recommended temperature and relative humidity should be maintained after precooling to prevent product quality will deteriorate.

NOTE The methods of transportation, condition of the transport equipment, loading method, transit and storage practices affect the success of pre cooling.

## 7 Choice of transportation

### 7.1 Mode of transportation

**7.1.1** After pre cooling, the produce shall be properly loaded and transported at or near the recommended storage temperature and relative humidity to maintain quality. The mode of transportation and carrier to maintain the product quality should be based on the following factors:

- a) destination;
- b) nature of the produce;
- c) degree of produce perishability;
- d) amount of produce to be transported;
- e) recommended storage temperature and relative humidity;
- f) outside temperature conditions at origin and destination points;
- g) time in transit to reach destination by air, land, or ocean transport;
- h) reliability and quality of transportation service.

**7.1.2** Reliability and quality of transportation service available shall be carefully considered together with the rates charged.

**7.1.3** A temperature of 40-44 °F should be maintained for refrigerated transportation of fresh produce.

**7.1.4** Products shall be protected through close coordination of origin and destination airport and particularly if shipped in unrefrigerated air containers or air cargo pallets. If there is a delay, produce should be placed in a refrigerated container at 40-44 °F. Cold storage facilities shall be available at ports to ensure product quality is maintained.

## **7.2 Equipment**

**7.2.1** The transport equipment shall be checked to ensure it is in good condition and working order and that it meets the needs of the fresh produce.

NOTE The condition of the transport equipment is critical to maintaining the quality of the produce.

**7.2.2** Room for air circulation shall be provided in transport equipment loaded with agricultural produce.

NOTE The nature of the produce, type of packaging and loading method affect circulation as well as the total weight and the volume occupied by the load.

**7.2.3** Maximum cargo weights of carriers should comply with restrictions to meet requirements of transport and handling equipment or Government agencies.

**7.2.4** Desirable features in refrigerated trailers up to 14.6 m (48 ft) long and van containers to 12 m (40 ft) long include:

- a) 42000 kJ/h (40,000 BTU/R) refrigeration capacity at 38 °C (100 °F) ambient, 2 °C (36 °F) return air temperature;
- b) a continuously operating high capacity evaporator blower for more even produce, temperatures and higher relative humidity;
- c) a solid return air bulkhead at the front of the trailer to ensure air circulation throughout the load;
- d) vertical ribs on the rear floor to assist air circulation;
- e) deep floor grooves or channels from 50-70 mm (2-3 mm) in depth to provide an adequate cross sectional area for air circulation under loads placed directly on the floor;
- f) supply air temperature sensing of the operation of the refrigeration unit to reduce produce chilling and freezing injury;
- g) provisions for ventilation to prevent ethylene or carbon dioxide build up.

**7.2.5** The shipper should check the equipment to ensure it is in good working order and meets the needs of the produce. Carriers shall provide guidance on checking and operating the refrigeration systems.

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### 7.3 Checking of equipment

**7.3.1** All transportation equipment should be checked for:

- a) cleanliness;
- b) damage walls, floors, doors, ceilings;
- c) temperature control;
- d) air ride suspension;
- e) air flow circulation.

**7.3.2** Guidelines for cleaning and maintaining transportation equipment:

- a) the load compartment shall be cleaned regularly;
- b) walls, floors, doors, ceilings shall be in good condition;
- c) refrigerated units should be calibrated and supply continuous air circulation for uniform produce temperatures;
- d) operation and condition of doors, ventilation openings and seals;
- e) provisions for load locking and bracing;
- f) air-ride suspension should reduce the amount of shock and vibration transferred to the shipping containers and the produce inside;
- g) air flow in modern containers should allow cold air to leave the front part of the container and circulate from below towards the back, then rising to the upper part of the container;
- h) smell from previous deliveries or incompatible loads;
- i) toxic chemical residues;
- j) insect nesting in equipment;
- k) decaying remains of agricultural produce;
- l) debris blocking drain openings or air circulation channels along the floor.

**7.3.3** For refrigerated trailers and van containers, the following additional checks are important:

- a) check for light that may enter through door due to damaged gasket seals;
- b) refrigeration unit should cycle to maintain the desirable air temperature;

- c) determine the location of the sensing element which controls the discharge air to ensure the thermostat is effectively regulating the temperature;
- d) a solid return air bulk head should be installed at the front of the trailer;
- e) equipment with a top air delivery system should have a fabric air chute or metal ceiling duct in good condition.

## 7.4 Loading

**7.4.1** Produce requiring refrigeration should be pre cooled prior to loading into transportation equipment. Produce temperatures shall be taken with an appropriate thermometer and recorded on the bill of lading for future reference. The load compartment in the equipment shall be precooled to the recommended transport or storage temperature for the produce. It is advisable, that the loading area should be enclosed and if available the loading dock doorway area should be equipped with doorway air seals.

Mix loads shall be packed to ensure product compatibility and quality is not compromised.

NOTE Proper loading practices are critical in maintaining temperature and relative humidity, protecting the produce from impact and vibration in transit and preventing insects from entering the load.

**7.4.2** Basic loading methods include:

- a) bulk loading by machine or hand, or unpackaged commodities;
- b) hand loading individual shipping containers with or without pallets;
- c) unit loading of palletized load of containers with pallet jacks or forklifts.

**7.4.3** Loads should be secured with one or more of the following materials to prevent vibration and impact damage in transport and handling:

- a) aluminum or wood load locks;
- b) wood blocking and nailing strips;
- c) cargo nets and straps.

## 7.5 Mixed Loads

**7.5.1** Similar sized shipping containers should be loaded together in mixed loads for increased stability. Heavier shipping containers of produce should be loaded first, distributed evenly across the floor of the trailer or container. Lighter shipping containers can then be placed against or on top of the heavier produce. Load, lock and secure stacks of different sized shipping containers. To facilitate inspection of mixed loads at ports of entry, a representative sample of each commodity should be available near the door. This can minimize the unloading of cargo for examination.

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**7.5.2** Never load produce with cargoes that provide any risk of contamination through transfer of odour or toxic chemical residues. The longer the transit, the higher the risks in transporting mixed loads of agricultural produce. Therefore it is essential that guidelines be followed as much as possible to maintain quality in distant markets.

**7.5.3** Inadequate provisions for air circulation will ruin a load, even in well designed transportation equipment.

**7.5.4** When possible, shipping containers should be kept off shallow floors and away from flat side walls by using pallets and racks. Adequate head space between the upper row of cartons and the top of the container should be allowed; this may be done by taping or gluing the upper row of cartons or by using appropriately designed packages for the purpose. Room for air circulation shall be provided under, around and through the load to protect the produce from:

- a) heat gain from the outside air during hot weather;
- b) heat generated by the produce through respiration;
- c) concentrations of ethylene from ripening of the produce;
- d) chilling injury or freezing injury during operation of the respiration unit.

**7.5.5** Shippers using refrigerated transport equipment should follow the carrier's recommendations on loading and setting the temperature of the equipment's load compartment to avoid chilling injury or freezing injury to produce.

NOTE Discharge air may be colder than the set-point temperature if the refrigeration system operates on return air temperature sensing.

**7.5.6** Shippers and receivers shall follow the temperature recorder company's instructions on documenting the load, starting the recorder, reading the results, and returning it for calibration and certification, if necessary.

NOTE These steps are essential for settling claims over temperature management during transportation.

## **8 Pest control**

Shippers should avoid loading at night. Insects attracted by light can enter the load and cause problems upon inspection at destination. The loading areas should be enclosed to prevent insects from re-infesting treated and packaged produce.

## **9 Purchaser and producer information**

**9.2** Producers of fresh produce shall keep appropriate records of activities relating to the harvesting, grading, marketing, storage and transporting of their produce (see Annex A).

**9.3** Fresh produce purchasers shall keep up to date records to demonstrate that suppliers:

- a) transport and deliver their products in compliance with the best practices outlined in this code,
- b) to ensure that suppliers have a proven track record in supplying a quality and safe product, and
- c) to help trace the history of the produce from farm to the final consumer.

**9.3.1** The fresh produce shall be visually inspected at delivery for physical damage, contamination, temperature, and other characteristics (see Annex B).

**9.4** Appropriate purchaser records shall be kept for a minimum of three years, unless otherwise legally required for a longer period.

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