



FPC PRESS RELEASE

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Air freight proposals for organic fresh produce fudged

The Fresh Produce Consortium welcomes the Soil Association's decision not to impose a ban on organic certification of air freighted produce, but calls the decision a 'fudge' as the Association announces that it will 'monitor' the situation.

"It's a shame it has taken eighteen months before some common sense has prevailed. In the meantime the same African farming communities the Association says it wishes to support have suffered significant heartache and concern," said Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC). "It appears that the Soil Association has finally taken on board concerns we raised a year ago regarding the lack of real data and has accepted the need for accurate information upon which to make decisions. Without this the Soil Association's proposals would, without question, have serious negative implications for farmers and growers in Africa who need fast access to European markets."

A year ago FPC said: "The Soil Association is getting ahead of itself in its efforts to achieve laudable objectives by making policy decisions in the absence of real data." FPC will continue to monitor the Soil Association's deliberations to ensure that the Association's proposals do not promote unnecessary additional bureaucracy and cost to a supply chain already under significant strain.

Around 60% of fruit and vegetables are imported into the UK, providing produce outside of the UK season as well as varieties which simply cannot be grown in the UK. Agricultural growth is essential to economic growth in Africa; imports to the UK from Kenya alone are worth £100 million, with trade providing direct employment for 135,000 people.

The Soil Association originally proposed a ban on air freighted organic fruit and vegetables unless farmers carried out bureaucratic, expensive, time consuming measures; a move which would have misled UK consumers, limit consumer choice, and threatened the livelihood of farmers in developing countries.

There is no evidence that fewer aircraft would fly if less imported fruit and vegetables were eaten, as at least 60% of air freighted fresh produce is brought to the UK in the bellyhold of passenger aircraft. Air freighted fresh produce on dedicated cargo planes accounts for a mere 0.12% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions.

Total air freighted imports of fruit and vegetables account for 0.2% of total UK greenhouse gas emissions. If the Soil Association really wanted to tackle UK greenhouse gas emissions then it should focus on other areas of farming and food production.

Air freight allows us to enjoy a wide variety of fruit and vegetables throughout the year. Both government and the food industry (Eat in Colour campaign www.eatincolour.com) are making vast efforts to encourage higher consumption of fruit and vegetables among the proportion of the population who still find 5-a-day a daunting prospect, and these proposals threatened to make a large section of the grocery aisle out of bounds.

"We do need to look at ways of tackling climate change, but the concept of 'food miles' is confusing and generates a false sense of eco-security. Instead let's look at the carbon footprint of the whole product supply chain and provide consumers with meaningful advice on which to make informed decisions," said Nigel Jenney. "The Fresh Produce Consortium is working with the Carbon Trust and others to look at how we can identify sources of emissions and reduce the carbon footprint of companies and their products."

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Notes for editors:

In 2006, the UK produced domestically 11% of its fruit, and 51% of its vegetables (excluding potatoes). The UK imported 3.5 million tonnes of fruit and 1.9 million tonnes of vegetables in the same year. (*Source: Defra*).

The biggest airfreight exporter of fresh produce in Sub-Saharan Africa is Kenya which in 2005 exported 32,000 tonnes of fresh produce to the UK (91% of all its fresh fruit and vegetable exports).

View FPC's response to the Soil Association's consultation at www.freshproduce.org.uk/newsdesk.php

1. The Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) is the UK's fresh produce trade association and is based in Peterborough. The FPC has represented the fresh produce sector for many years and is recognised across the UK and EU as the voice of the industry.
2. Extensive membership covers the complete spectrum of industry businesses including growers, importers, wholesalers, retailers, distributors, processors, packers, food service companies and other allied organisations.

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