



## **PLU Codes Frequently Asked Questions**

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### **What is a Price Look-up (PLU) code?**

PLU codes are 4- or 5-digit numbers that have been used by retailers since 1990 to make check-out and inventory control easier, faster and more accurate. They ensure that the correct price is charged to consumers by removing the need for cashiers to identify the product (e.g., whether it is conventionally or organically grown, etc.). They are primarily assigned to identify individual bulk fresh produce (and related items such as nuts and herbs) and will appear on a small sticker applied to the individual fresh produce item. The PLU code identifies produce items based upon various attributes that can include the commodity, the variety, the growing methodology (e.g., organic) and the size group.

The 4-digit PLU codes for produce are assigned randomly within a series of numbers within the 3000 and 4000 series. There is no intelligence built into the 4-digit code. For example, no one number within the 4-digit number represents anything in particular. The 4-digit codes indicate conventionally grown produce. The 5-digit codes identify organic produce. Five-digit PLUs for organic produce begin with a '9', which is placed in front of the 4-digit conventionally grown code. The 5-digit organic codes are not listed in the PLU codes database because they simply have the prefix '9' added to the conventionally grown produce PLU codes.

PLU codes are assigned by the IFPS after rigorous review at both the national and international levels.

### **What is the International Federation for Produce Standards (IFPS)?**

The International Federation for Produce Standards (IFPS) is composed of national produce associations from around the globe.

The long-term objective of the federation is to improve the supply chain efficiency of the fresh produce industry through developing, implementing and managing harmonized international standards.

For further information about the IFPS, please visit [www.ifpsglobal.com](http://www.ifpsglobal.com).

### **Is it required to label fresh produce with PLU codes?**

No, the PLU system is voluntary and based on business needs. It is not regulated by a governmental agency. Specifically, no regulatory body requires a PLU code sticker on loose produce. Labeling produce with PLU codes is typically required by the retail industry to assist with point-of-sale (POS) identification. In various countries, most medium to large retailers expect a PLU as part of conducting business.

## Why are some produce items labeled and others not?

Some items will be marked with PLU codes while others are not. In some cases, it does not make sense to use a PLU sticker (e.g., for green beans or mushrooms); however, PLU codes may be used on signage or by another means for these types of commodities. Other items like apples or leaf lettuce are being either stickered or banded with a PLU code. The principal objective of PLU codes is to create a common code that becomes the building block for system-wide communication of electronic data.

## How many PLU codes have been assigned?

Currently, there are over 1,500 global PLU codes assigned to fresh produce and related items.

## How do I obtain a complete list of PLU codes?

Refer to the [IFPS PLU search page](#), then simply select 'Search'. Do not fill in or select any options from the fields. This will present the entire list of existing PLU codes. You then have the option to export the entire list to Excel and manipulate the list however you choose.

## How do I code an item that does not have a PLU code in the database?

If a code does not currently exist for a produce item, a Retailer Assigned PLU Code can be used or an application can be submitted for a new PLU code if the criteria are met.

## What is a Retailer Assigned PLU Code and how is it assigned?

Retailer Assigned PLU codes allow retailers to designate their own numbers for items that do not have a standard PLU code assigned. After a supplier makes specific arrangements with all retailers that will receive the item, a Retailer Assigned PLU Code may be used. We recommend that you get the agreement in writing for your records.

For some commodities where there are a large number of varieties (e.g., apples or oranges), a block of Retailer Assigned PLU codes is available to identify those varieties that do not currently have a PLU code. *It is **important** to contact each retailer to ensure that a Retailer Assigned PLU code does not overlap with another commodity using a standard PLU code as this could inadvertently corrupt a retailers POS system.* Again, it is recommended that you get the agreement in writing for your records.

## How do I apply for a new PLU code?

The application and criteria can be located by selecting the menu option from the [IFPS PLU Code page](#) under 'Apply for a New PLU'. There you will find the assignment criteria along with the application and supporting documentation needed. PLU applications are reviewed on a set schedule; please refer to the application assignment criteria for submittal and approval dates (also shown below).

## **What is the review process for a PLU application?**

The application is first reviewed for completeness and data accuracy. The application is then forwarded to the Member Organizations of IFPS. Each IFPS Member Organization has a review process within its country for each application, including commodity specific and retail review, after which it is submitted to the IFPS Produce Identification Committee and then to the IFPS Board.

The IFPS Board of Directors makes the final decision on whether to approve or deny the application at quarterly board meetings.

## **How long does it take to receive a final response regarding a PLU application submittal?**

It typically takes an average of three (3) months to receive a response from the IFPS. Please refer to the table below for actual submission and decision dates.

<b>Deadline for Submission</b>	<b>Deadline for Comments</b>	<b>IFSP Decision Date</b>
November 1	December 15	January 31
February 1	March 15	April 30
May 1	June 15	July 31
August 1	September 15	October 31

## **Are there any limitations to applying for a new PLU code?**

The product must be a unique variety and available to the entire global produce industry. Please refer to the Assignment Criteria section on the PLU application for further information.

## **Is there a minimum production number required to be granted a new PLU code?**

Depending on the commodity, there are production thresholds that the committees use as a reference when reviewing PLU applications. However, they are only used as a means of guidance and are not a determining factor for granting a PLU code.

## **Is there a fee to apply for a new PLU code?**

A non-refundable processing fee is required for each new PLU application considered by the IFPS. The fee is \$1300 USD for a member of any IFPS Member Organization (refer [here](#)) or \$2300 USD for non-members. If an applicant is unsure of their member status, they should contact the corresponding organization shown [here](#). Fees help defer administrative and processing fees, facilitate translations and support the IFPS in its global activities.

## **How do I code organically grown produce with a PLU code?**

As mentioned above, 5-digit PLUs for organic produce begin with a '9', which is placed in front of the 4-digit PLU code for the conventionally grown item. For example, the PLU code for a standard yellow banana is 4011 where an organically grown standard yellow banana would be 94011.

### **Are there any other prefixes that signify any other type of processing?**

No, the only existing established prefix is the '9'.

### **What happened to the prefix '8' previously designated to identify GMO produce items?**

As the adoption of PLU codes has gained traction, the IFPS has committed to transitioning the previously unused '8' prefix to accommodate an increase in varieties of fresh produce items as they enter the market.

Though the '8' prefix (83000-84999) was once reserved for GMO produce items, the prefix was never used at retail. Stripping the prefix of this particular designation will yield one thousand additional PLU codes to be used.

In the future, the IFPS will begin assigning IFPS PLU codes utilizing the 83000 and 84000 series; however, unlike the '9', the leading digit '8' will have no significance. When this occurs, the 83000 series will be used to assign PLU codes for conventionally grown produce items and the 84000 series will be used to identify the corresponding organic item.

### **Why would a PLU code be 6 digits in length?**

PLU codes should only be 4 or 5 digits in length. PLU codes with 6 digits are not part of the internationally standardized list of PLU codes for use with fresh produce, so PMA cannot provide much clarity on where the number originated or what it represents. It may be part of a proprietary coding system outside the scope of the international list. PMA suggests you contact the produce manager at your local store as he/she may have access to this information.

### **Why would a PLU code start with a number other than a '9'?**

The only prefix recognized by the global system to represent organically grown produce is '9'. PLU codes starting with any other number prefix is not part of the internationally standardized list of PLU codes for use with fresh produce, so the IFPS cannot provide clarity on where the number originated or what it represents. It may be part of a proprietary coding system outside the scope of the international list. The IFPS suggests you contact the produce manager at your local store as he/she may have access to this information.

### **Do the individual numbers in the PLU code indicate anything?**

PLU codes are simply business tools used for inventory control, accurate price tags at the register and data to inform retailers what customers are purchasing. The codes are not intended to convey information to consumers.

The prefix '9' in front of a 4-digit standard PLU code is used to identify organically grown items, however, to be sure the item is a certified organic product, one should look for the USDA organic seal on the product.

To identify a specific growing method for a produce item, consumers should consult their produce managers at their retail stores.

## **Do I need to put the name of the commodity/variety or company name on the PLU sticker?**

No, the PLU coding system is a voluntary system and is used primarily for POS identification at the retailer. The only requirement for the sticker is the 4- or 5-digit number. If there is enough retail space on the sticker, you can place additional information as desired.

## **What font should I use for my PLU stickers?**

You should follow these recommendations when printing standard PLU codes:

- For maximum legibility at checkout, each digit in the PLU code should be a minimum 14-point type size. Where a larger label permits, a larger font may be used (there is no maximum size).
- With the introduction of DataBar on the label, the average point size recommended is between 10 point and 12 point.
- The PLU code should be printed in high contrast to the background. Black print on a white background is ideal. The higher the contrast, the better the legibility.
- At all times remember that the numbers must be read quickly and accurately when viewed by a cashier through a clear plastic bag.
- Please print the PLU sticker so the number is the most prominent element on the label. The PLU number should appear as large as possible on the label.

## **May I put the trademarked name on the PLU sticker?**

Yes. The IFPS only controls the integrity of the number itself. If a packer chooses to add a brand name to the label, it is up to them to be certain that their receivers (buyers) will accept it.

## **How do I differentiate growing regions with a PLU code?**

The PLU code system is a globally used system so unless specified, the code can be used for any growing region. Growing regions were designated when the system was first established, but restricted regions are no longer assigned because it is now a global system. If only one number is provided in the PLU list, use that one. If two numbers are provided (one with a restriction for a specific growing region), use the one that corresponds to the correct growing region.

## **What do the restrictions mean on the list?**

There are certain PLU codes which were originally assigned for a specific region outside or inside of the U.S. and Canada when the system was first established. Although PLU codes are now considered global, they are, for various reasons, impossible to incorporate in markets outside of those restricted regions. For those PLU codes 'Restricted from ANY use in Canada or U.S.', the recommendation is to only use these PLU codes for items grown and/or sold outside of Canada or U.S. For those items where PLU codes exist to designate specific U.S. or Canadian growing regions, the geographical restrictions/designations are noted. *Regional restrictions are no longer accepted now that PLU codes are global.*

## How do I know what the size breaks are for a particular size identification?

From the PLU Search Results page, select the PLU code and it will display all the associated information for that particular code including the sizes or counts that correspond with the size description. There are typically 'Small' and 'Large' sizes of produce. Listed below are the sizes that typically represent those descriptions.

- For North America, 'Small' typically represents 100 size and smaller and 'Large' represents 88 size and larger.
- For the Rest of the World, 'Small' represents Average fruit weight < 150g and 'Large' represents Average fruit weight > 150g.
  - The size (count 100 or 88) refers to the number of fruit or vegetables in a standard box most commonly in use in N. America.
  - Average produce weight or diameter is not a minimum weight or diameter, but the average weight or diameter of the items contained in the box irrespective of its size (capacity).
- There are also 'Medium' and 'Extra Large' sizes, which would be defined in the detailed display for each commodity on the Search Results page.

## Where can the most recently added PLU codes be found?

On the [IFPS Identification page](#), the 'Recently Added/New PLU Codes' can be found under 'PLU Code News'. If you select that link, you will get a table of the most recently added PLU codes.

## Are there any language requirements for PLU labels?

This is determined by your target market. For example, in the U.S., there are no language requirements relative to PLU labels. However, in Canada, there are requirements around printing in French, but typically any additional information you choose to include on a PLU label is printed in English.

Please contact your receivers/buyers to understand particular requirements in your target market.

## Canada and the United States have country of origin declaration or labeling requirements. Do I need to include the country of origin on my PLU label?

There is no Canadian regulatory requirement to put country of origin information on a PLU label used on bulk unpackaged fresh fruits and vegetable products. In general, Canadian labeling regulations require a country of origin declaration (and other labeling in accordance with the [Safe Food for Canadians Regulations \[SFCR\]](#) and [Food and Drug Regulations \[FDR\]](#)) on pre-packaged product and shipping containers, unless an exception exists. (See exceptions for fresh fruits and vegetables - [SFCR 213](#), [SFCR 268 and 269](#).) For more information on Canadian requirements on labels please review all PLU FAQ's. In the U.S., regulations for Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) took effect in March 2009. It requires that retailers notify their customers of the country of origin for fresh produce. If the product is labeled with a sticker, the regulation requires that the majority of product in a retail bin/display needs to be labeled for

compliance. Otherwise, the retailer can simply put up a sign in the store by the product. To ensure compliance with the regulation in the U.S., the USDA conducts in-store COOL reviews.

### **Is it acceptable to add our company's website on the PLU label?**

This is a marketing decision each company makes. However, be aware that, if the website contains any nutritional information on the product, and depending on the target market, it may trigger the country-specific requirements. You should contact your receivers to understand the requirements in your target market.

### **How can I find out about an individual sticker or adhesive used?**

To get specific information about PLU stickers, one should contact the company using the sticker.

### **Are PLU labels / stickers food safe?**

PLU stickers are, in general, made from three components – adhesive, plastic film or paper, and ink. These three components are required to meet national and local regulations for food safety. Label manufacturers are required to comply with these regulations.

*Detailed information on PLU sticker safety and sustainability can be found [here](#).*

### **What is the DataBar and how does it relate to the PLU code?**

The DataBar is the name of the barcode that acts similarly to the linear Universal Product Code (UPC). It is encoded with a 14-digit number called a Global Trade Item Number (GTIN). It was designed to fit on smaller items that are not large enough to use a traditional GTIN barcode; (e.g., loose/bulk produce). This barcode, also called a Stacked Omni-directional DataBar, can be printed on the same sticker on which the PLU code is printed.

### **Will I still need to use the PLU code if I am using the DataBar?**

Yes, the PLU code will be the human readable portion of the label if the DataBar does not scan.

### **Do I need to include the PLU code when creating my GTIN to be encoded in the DataBar?**

No, because the GTIN is company specific and the prefix varies in numeric length, a company might not have the space to include the 4- or 5-digit PLU code in the 14-digit GTIN. If you have the space to use your company-specific prefix and the PLU code as the item reference portion of the GTIN and still have the preceding '0' and the ending check digit, then you can use the PLU code if you desire. It is recommended you simply create your own GTINs as you see fit to capture all the bulk products in your item catalog.

### **What is a QR code and can it be used in place of a PLU code?**

A Quick Response code (QR) is a two-dimensional barcode and resembles a UPC more than a PLU code. Barcodes are usually linked to a database that the scanning device pulls information from (price, name, etc.) whereas QR Codes contain information. QR codes do not need to pull data from a database because the information is embedded within the actual code.