

United Nations Electronic Quality (eQuality) Certificate In the Trade of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

In many countries, the application of UNECE standards for agricultural products - but also the application of national marketing standards - is monitored by inspection. A certificate of conformity may confirm compliance with the standards. These certificates often play a special role in export or even import. Especially, when they must be available before customs clearance.

The movement of perishable agricultural products is fast. At no point along the transport route should the goods stand for an unnecessarily long time. It is therefore important that the inspection and the issuing of the certificates be carried out within a reasonable period. Often, issuing certificates in paper form - with signature and stamp - and waiting for these papers is time-consuming. In addition, care must be taken to ensure that these documents are not tampered with and are carried in the means of transport and properly presented at the next control point or customs. To ensure this an electronic certificate can provide significant relief. With an e-certificate, the information can be transported faster and more securely from the control service to the recipient of the message.

UN/CEFACT, together with the UNECE Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, has developed a standard for an eQuality certificate. This is clearly structured, aligned with the UNECE and OECD model for paper documents, yet flexible enough to allow the inclusion of additional data. Countries or inspection services wishing to introduce e-certification in the conformity control of e.g., fresh fruit and vegetables are recommended to use the UN/CEFACT Business Requirement Specification for eQuality.

The UN/CEFACT Business Requirement Specification for electronic quality certificates ([eQuality BRS](#)) is a specification which has been developed and is maintained by the UN/CEFACT Agriculture, Fisheries and Agri-food domain.

This BRS contains definitions of important business terms, a list of the stakeholders involved in the exchange of electronic quality certificates and a description of the activities for request, approval, issuance, verification, and processing of quality certificates.

The document further contains Business Information Elements, i.e. a list of data elements that are contained in an eQuality certificate. The description of these data elements includes information:

- about the type of the data elements (for example whether it is a text field or a date)
- whether the data element is mandatory or optional and whether it can be repeated several times (for example there could be multiple instances of an “attachment” to a quality certificate)
- the structure in which the data element is embedded (for example a “Post Code” and a “City name” both belong to the structure “Trade address”).
- a description of the data element using terms that are understandable to stakeholders of Quality certificates.

Appendix 1 of the BRS includes a mapping of the data elements in the eQuality certificates to the data elements of the paper quality certificate pictured in Appendix 2. This mapping using UN/CEFACT methodology, shows where the data element in its box on the paper form is located in the structure of the electronic form.

UN/CEFACT uses the specifications provided in this BRS to generate the eQuality XML Schema. This Schema is a computer readable file and allows computer systems to interpret and process the information provided in an electronic Quality certificate.

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