

Title The role of quality assessments as a decision making tool in the imported fruit (sea freight) value chain

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Abstract

Quality of fresh produce imported by sea freight is more complex to manage than domestic product quality, because of extended time and distance from grower to consumer. This paper discusses quality aspects of postharvest management of fresh fruit imported by sea freight, including the pressures that occur when a shipment of high value fruit arrives in below optimum condition. Understanding the complexities of all postharvest aspects of the value chain, and how these interact and impact on quality, will assist in delivering an acceptable degree of quality, dependent upon the standard of fruit shipped in the first place. Postharvest quality control can occur at any part of the value chain (e.g., packhouse, port of departure, retailer), but in the case of imported product often the most value can be added, from a quality assessment perspective, at the wholesale and distribution centre level. At this stage, quality assessment can be used to identify whether the product fits predetermined specifications. Any quality deterioration that may have occurred to that point can be checked and used to anticipate how product quality will change over time. Quality assessment should be based on both science and commercial practicality – compromise between the two is required in order to provide useful management information for maintaining quality and aiding commercial decisions. Assessment at arrival and ongoing monitoring of quality provide the basis for commercial decisions that will minimise loss and maximise profit. Detailed quality assessment adds value by providing a sound basis for commercial decisions that need to be made, rather than simply being a “pass or fail” intervention. Commercial decisions arising from quality findings may include those regarding sale potential, price, prioritisation of sale, and if necessary claims to the supplier.