

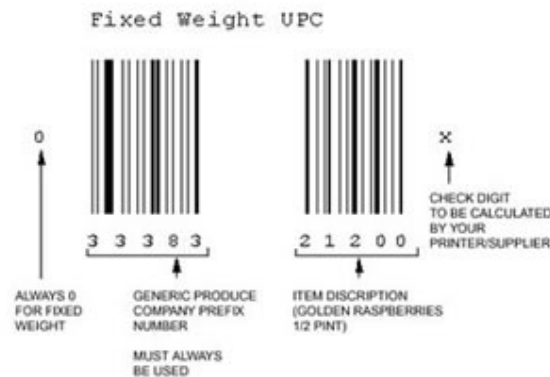
Fresh Facts: Produce Coding

In the produce sector there are many levels of product identification and data capture ranging from consumer items up to logistics units on a ship traveling across the ocean, on the back of a truck or by other conveyance. Gradually the industry is moving to adopt global standards in how this is accomplished but at this time there is limited implementation and at the consumer item level we are somewhat unique in how we identify product sold to consumers at retail.

Consumer item produce coding can be broken down into two categories:

Fixed Weight/Packaged

For many years the produce sector has utilized a system of UPC/GTINs* for fixed weight/packaged produce. These codes are composed of a generic company prefix (033383) and 5 digit item numbers which are assigned and governed by the North American produce industry.



*It is important to note that GTIN (Global Trade Item Number) is an umbrella term applying to many data structures used in data carriers such as the UPC-A and the emerging GS1 DataBar.

Loose/Bulk/ Variable Weight



PLU - The PLU (Price Look Up) codes utilized by the produce industry are a 4 or 5 digit number which uniquely identifies a commodity or variety of a commodity. PLU numbers are typically printed on a small label attached directly to individual produce items. Typically 4 digits long (e.g. 4011 for bananas), a 5th digit can be added to the front of the number for two purposes – to identify the product as an organically grown item (e.g. 9 is added to 4011 for organic bananas and the PLU becomes 94011) or to identify the product as genetically engineered (e.g. 8 is added to 4011 for genetically engineered/modified bananas and the PLU becomes 84011). Produce PLUs are assigned and governed by the **International Federation for Produce Standards (IFPS)**. In addition, like the industry standardized UPCs, blocks of **Retailer Assigned** numbers are reserved for individual retail use to introduce new product to their assortment. (In Canada the assignment of these numbers are coordinated by CPMA.)

Produce PLUs are used for retail produce identification in Canada, U.S., U.K., Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, and Norway. Additionally, large exporting countries such as South Africa, Chile, Mexico, Spain and others, place the PLU on product destined for the above markets.



GS1 DataBar – This emerging bar code is small enough to fit on a PLU sticker and can be used to capture company specific information in the actual barcode but will still carry the IFPS PLU as the human readable number. This allows retailers the flexibility of choosing to scan the bar code for product identification or continuing with the traditional practice of typing in the PLU number. More information is available at www.cpma.ca.

Why is it Important?

The most significant benefit of product identification is the ability to uniquely identify commodities and even varieties of produce. Without an accurate means of doing so, price stickers would need to be placed on items or cashiers would need to be able to identify product by sight and either remember, or look up, prices on a per item basis. Both would add human resource costs and create tremendous potential for human error and therefore financial loss. In addition, the more available information specific to a company or product, the better the potential for category management and product performance information.

What You Need to Know

Currently the predominant means of identifying packaged or loose produce in North America is generic – that is, neither the GTIN (UPC) or the IFPS PLU contain any information which identifies the company/brand owner of the product. Increasing business needs for company identification has been a catalyst towards the implementation of the GS1 DataBar as a solution for loose produce. Additionally, increasingly GTINs (UPCs) used on packaged produce, particularly fresh-cut/value-added produce, contain a company specific prefix which uniquely identifies the company/brand owner of the produce (encoded in a GTIN).

Canadian Retailer Assigned PLUs – Canadian retailers recently completed work on a standardized list of Retailer Assigned PLUs used by many retailers across Canada. This is a sub-set of the IFPS PLUs and augments those numbers. These numbers are for use ONLY in Canada at the direction of Canadian retailers. The list of Canadian nationally coordinated Retailer Assigned PLUs is available on the CPMA website.

CPMA Contacts and Other Resources

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Resources:

- www.cpma.ca
- GS1 organizations including GS1 Canada, GS1 US, and GS1 Head Office, Brussels.
<http://www.gs1.org/contact/worldwide.php>