



PLU Codes Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Price Look-Up (PLU) code?

PLU codes are 4 or 5 digit numbers which have been used by supermarkets since 1990 to make check-out and inventory control easier, faster, and more accurate. They ensure that the correct price is paid by consumers by removing the need for cashiers to identify the product; e.g., whether or not it is conventionally or organically grown. 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 piece of fresh produce. The PLU number identifies produce items based upon various attributes which 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 are for conventionally grown produce. 5-digit codes are used to identify organic produce. The prefix of '9' would be placed in front of the 4-digit conventionally grown code for organic produce. You will not see the 5 digit organic codes in the PLU codes database since they simply have the prefix '9' added to the conventionally grown produce PLU codes. In the future, the International Federation for Produce Standards (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.

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.

Is it required to label 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 sticker on loose produce. Labeling produce with PLU codes are 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. One can't imagine green beans or mushrooms with stickers, 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 which becomes the building block for system wide communication of electronic data.

How many PLU codes have been assigned?

Currently, there are over 1,400 global PLU codes assigned to produce and related items.

How do I obtain a complete list of PLU codes?

Refer to the [IFPS PLU search page](#) and 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 doesn't have a PLU code in the database?

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

How do I apply for a new PLU code?

There is an application process and criteria which can be located by selecting the menu option from the [IFPS PLU Code page](#) for 'Apply for a New PLU'. It contains 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.

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

A non-refundable processing fee is required for each new application considered by the IFPS. The fee is \$1000 USD for a member of any IFPS Member Organization (refer [here](#)) or \$2000 USD for non-members. If an applicant is unsure of their status as a member, please contact the corresponding organization shown [here](#). Fees help defer administrative and processing fees and support the IFPS in its global activities.

What is the review process for a PLU application?

The application is first reviewed for completeness and accuracy of data. 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 response regarding an application submittal?

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

Deadline for Submission	Deadline for Comments	Decision Date
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 restrictions for applying for a new PLU code?

The product must be a unique variety, available to the entire global produce industry and available from multiple marketers. Codes will not be assigned for a product that is controlled by one grower or by multiple growers that are controlled by a single entity. Please refer to the Criteria for Number Assignments section on the 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 applications. However, they are only used as a means of guidance and not a determining factor for granting a PLU code.

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 suggest 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 are available to identify these varieties that don't currently have a PLU code.

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

Add a '9' in front of the four 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.

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.

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

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

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 is unable to provide much clarity on where the number originated and what it represents. Perhaps it is 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 that information.

Why would a PLU code start with the number '6' or something other than a '9'?

The only prefix recognized by the global system is '9' which represents organically grown produce. PLU codes starting with the prefix '6' are not part of the internationally standardized list of PLU codes for use with fresh produce, so PMA is unable to provide much clarity on where the number originated and what it represents. Perhaps it is 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 that information.

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 future years. The 83000 series will be reserved for conventionally grown items where the 84000 series will designate the corresponding organic item.

Do the individual numbers in the PLU code indicate anything?

PLU codes are simply business tools used for inventory control, accurate price rings 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 (point-of-sale) 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 whatever else you'd like to place on the sticker.

What font should I use for my PLU stickers?

You should follow these recommendations when printing standard PLU codes:

- For maximum legibility at the checkout, each digit in the PLU code should be a minimum 14 point type size. Where a larger label permits, a larger type 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.
- A serif style font is generally more legible than a non-serif font.

May I put the trademarked name on the PLU sticker?

The industry can put whatever they want on the sticker. 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 system is a globally used system so unless specified, the code can be used for any growing region. 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 codes for items grown and/or sold outside of Canada or U.S. For those items where codes exist to designate specific U.S. or Canadian growing regions, the geographical restrictions/designations are noted.

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

From the Search Results page, select the PLU code and it will display all the associated information for that particular code including the the sizes or counts that correspond with the size description. There are typically 'small' and 'large' sizes of produce. Listed below are the sizes which 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 to understand any 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. In general, Canadian labeling regulations require a country of origin declaration on pre-packaged product and shipping containers. 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. Please contact your receivers to understand any particular requirements in your target market.

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

To get specific information about a particular sticker, one should contact the company using the sticker.

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 UPC (Universal Product Code). It is encoded with a 14 digit number called a GTIN (Global Trade Item Number). 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 the Stacked Ominidirectional 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'm 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, since 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 want to. 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 QR code is a Quick Response code. It is a 2 dimensional barcode and it is more similar to a UPC than a PLU code. Bar codes are usually linked to a database that the scanning device pulls information from (price, name, etc.) whereas QR Codes actually contain information. QR Codes do not need to pull data from a database because the information is embedded within the code.