



## Fresh Facts for Industry: **Produce Coding**

There are many levels of product identification and data capture in the fresh produce sector, 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.

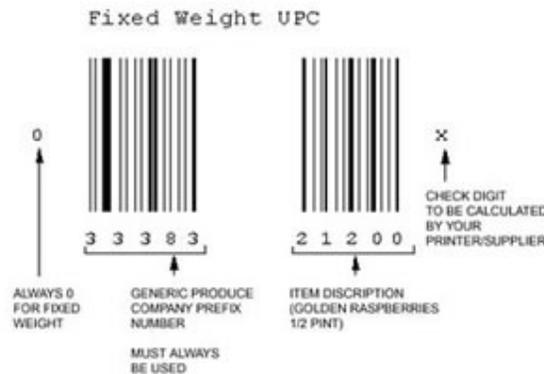
For many years, consumer item identification in Canada has been primarily generic in nature, utilizing the industry-coordinated UPCs and PLUs. However, the industry is slowly transitioning to the global standards for identification using GTINs (Global Trade Item Numbers). At the case and pallet level, identification is also transitioning to these standards. **To assist industry in an understanding of the basics of produce identification, the following resource is available: [Produce Identification e-Learning Module](#)**

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

### **Fixed Weight/Packaged**

**Universal Product Code (UPC).** UPCs are used on fruits and vegetables that are sold by fixed weight, count, or volume (e.g.: 3 lb bag of apples, 3 count tomato, ½ pint of blueberries). A UPC contains 12 digits (including the smaller digits to the extreme left and right). UPC bar codes are scanned to obtain the price of the item.

For many years, the produce sector has utilized a system of generic UPCs for fixed weight/fixed count 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.



**As of December 31, 2019, CPMA and PMA no longer issue new generic UPCs although it is recognized that their use will continue as the transition to brand-specific GTINs evolves. Both organizations will support the industry in adopting brand owner (company-specific) UPCs for North American produce.**

The flyer [From Generic U.P.C. to Brand Owner-Specific U.P.C.](#) highlights how the use of brand owner-specific GTINs enables trading partners to tie product information to brand owners and improve category management while also enhancing product traceability and business efficiencies.

## **Loose/Bulk/ Variable Weight**



**Price Look Up (PLU) Code** - The PLU 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 (9) can be added to the front of the number to identify the product as an organically grown item (e.g. 9 is added to 4011 for organic bananas and the PLU becomes 94011). 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.

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

**The list of IFPS PLUs in English or French is available for download on the [IFPS website](#).** The French translation of the IFPS PLUs was developed by CPMA and the [Quebec Produce Marketing Association](#) (QPMA) to meet the needs of their respective memberships.

**The IFPS has launched a user-friendly app, FreshPLU, to help users across the supply chain source PLUs.** To aid fresh produce shippers, who are increasingly being asked to synchronize their data, the mobile app and the enhanced website search engine now also include a link with the GS1 Global Classification Code (GPC). The FreshPLU app can be downloaded for free from the Google Play Store and Apple App Store. In the Apple store, search for “Fresh PLU”; in the Google Play Store, search for “FreshPLU”.



**GS1 DataBar (Loose/Bulk/Variable Weight)** – This bar code ([GS1 Stacked Omni-Directional DataBar](#)) is small enough to fit on a PLU sticker and can be used to capture company specific information in the barcode, but still includes 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. The IFPS guide [Implementation of GS1 DataBar for the Global Fresh Produce Industry](#) provides more information about the effective use of the GS1 DataBar.

## **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 information that is available specific to a company or product, the better the potential for category management and product performance information.

### **CPMA Contact and Other Resources**

For more information, please contact Jane Proctor at [jproctor@cpma.ca](mailto:jproctor@cpma.ca), or Shannon Sommerauer at [ssommerauer@cpma.ca](mailto:ssommerauer@cpma.ca). CPMA members can also use the following resources:

- CPMA website – [UPC FAQs](#)
- CPMA website – [PLU FAQs](#)
- [Webinar – The Future of Produce Identification](#)
- CPMA website – [Data Synchronization](#)
- International Federation of Produce Standards - [Implementation of GS1 DataBar for the Global Fresh Produce Industry](#)
- [GS1 organizations including GS1 Canada, GS1 US, and GS1 Head Office, Brussels](#)