



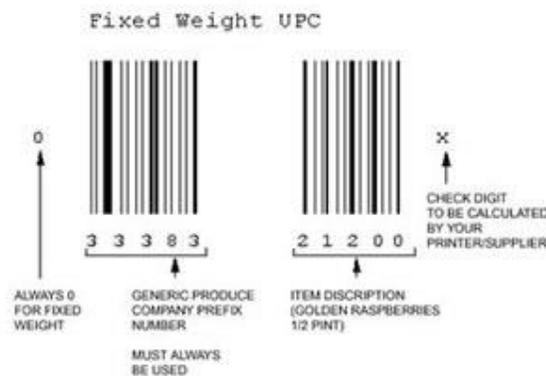
## Fresh Facts for Industry: Produce Coding

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 the consumer item level produce is still somewhat unique in how industry identifies 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 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.



### 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 (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.



**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. More information is available at <https://www.cpma.ca/industry/supply-chain-efficiencies/coding-identification-in-canada/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.

### **What You Need to Know**

Currently in Canada, consumer item identification is primarily generic in nature utilizing the industry coordinated UPCs and PLUs. That is, neither the UPC nor the IFPS PLU contain any information which identifies the company/brand owner of the product. The industry is, however, 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](#)

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

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### **Resources:**

- <https://www.cpma.ca/industry/supply-chain-efficiencies/data-synchronization>
- <https://www.cpma.ca/industry/supply-chain-efficiencies/coding-identification-in-canada>
- GS1 organizations including GS1 Canada, GS1 US, and GS1 Head Office, Brussels.  
<http://www.gs1.org/contact/worldwide.php>