Charter of Good Shipping Practices for efficient and fair fresh produce logistics

A FOUNDATIONAL SET OF PRINCIPLES AND COMMITMENTS TO GUIDE AND SUPPORT BEHAVIOR AND PROCESSES THROUGHOUT MARITIME SUPPLY CHAINS FOR FRESH PRODUCE

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PREAMBLE

The Charter of Good Shipping Practices for efficient and fair fresh produce logistics ("the Charter") is intended to serve as a shared foundational framework for stakeholders in maritime supply chains for fresh produce. It aims to foster mutual understanding and collaboration, strengthening partnerships, and enhancing efficiency across the supply chain. Recognizing shipping's vital role in global food systems, the Charter underscores the importance of transparent, efficient, and responsible practices to build trust and advance sustainability among trading partners.

Grounded in ethical conduct and open communication, the Charter encourages fair and transparent business practices, healthy competition, and operational excellence—acknowledging fair and reasonable returns for all stakeholders. Its five principles offer both aspirational guidance and practical tools for aligning daily operations with best practices.

> Upholding the central principles of collaboration, transparency, and fairness, this foundational set of values will anchor and transform global supply chains, increasing efficiency, reducing waste, and ensuring fair rewards for everyone.

By adhering to the Charter, stakeholders contribute to higher standards of integrity, responsibility, and collaboration within the shipping supply chain. The Charter is a living document. Though non-legally binding, it represents a collective effort to enhance efficiency and sustainability in fresh produce shipping by fostering a culture of integrity and trust amongst stakeholders.

SCOPE

The Charter is developed and put forward by the Global Coalition of Fresh Produce, together with all stakeholders across the fresh produce shipping supply chain. This includes, but is not limited to, exporters, importers, carriers, brokers, port and terminal operators, tech suppliers, and industry associations.

The Charter is built on five core principles:

Collaboration & communication—promote transparency, timely data sharing, and system interoperability to reduce inefficiencies and boost sustainability.

Fair & transparent business terms—apply transparency and clarity, equitable costs, and reasonable terms to avoid disputes.

Competition & efficiency—support a reliable, cost-effective shipping environment free from discrimination.

Cargo integrity & product quality—maintain optimal handling to preserve freshness, safety, and value.

Resilience & risk preparedness—enhance supply chain stability through proactive planning and coordinated response.

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Principle 1. COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

We acknowledge that collaborative engagement and transparent communication are critical to the success of the international fresh produce supply chain. When information is withheld or fragmented, inefficiencies multiply, resulting in food waste, environmental harm, underutilized assets, and reduced profitability. Disconnected data systems hinder operational visibility, making it difficult for stakeholders to implement appropriate measures and coordinate effectively.

Our commitment

1. **Collaborative dialogue**
   Promote timely, transparent communication and data-sharing to enable informed decision-making and enhance service quality.

2. **Consistent terminology**
   Use standard terms across the supply chain to avoid confusion and improve understanding in operations and contracts. Use standardized language across the supply chain to avoid misunderstandings and improve operational and contractual clarity.

3. **Operational transparency and timeliness**
   Provide prompt updates on schedule changes, including blank sailings and container redirections, with agreed lead times.

4. **Digital interoperability**
   Ensure digital systems can securely exchange standardized data. Share key operational details—such as vessel schedules and cargo conditions—and use tracking tools to strengthen traceability and efficiency.

5. **Data governance**
   Limit data access to authorized users and intended purposes. Maintain data accuracy, security, and protection against misuse.

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Principle 2. FAIR AND TRANSPARENT BUSINESS TERMS

We acknowledge that in today's complex maritime logistics landscape, opaque pricing and vague contract terms erode trust, proficiency, and profitability across the supply chain. Unexpected surcharges—and particularly demurrage and detention—often stem from delays outside cargo owners' control. These charges are frequently misunderstood and inconsistently applied. When invoices lack clear attribution for delays, disputes and financial strain follow.

Our commitment

1. **Clear and consistent contracts**
   Define each party's roles and responsibilities. Provide a transparent breakdown of freight costs—including base rates, surcharges, and penalties—using standard terms to avoid confusion and disputes.

2. **Justified and transparent charges**
   Ensure all fees are clearly communicated, reasonably applied, and open to review. Avoid arbitrary or excessive charges, particularly for demurrage, detention, and congestion when delays are beyond the importer's control.

3. **Reasonable free time allowances**
   Offer sufficient demurrage-free days based on cargo type and port conditions. Allow flexible extensions when delays are anticipated to prevent unfair penalties.

4. **Advance notification of fee changes**
   Carriers must provide timely written notice before introducing new fees or changing existing rates.

5. **Collaborative communication**
   Maintain open and timely dialogue among stakeholders to improve scheduling, reduce idle time, and prevent avoidable charges.

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Principle 3. COMPETITION AND EFFICIENCY

We acknowledge that restricted access to shipping services and ongoing operational inefficiencies disrupt the entire value chain, from growers to consumers. In some trade lanes, limited service options and anti-competitive practices hinder exporters' ability to secure timely and cost-effective transport. Without adequate oversight and transparency, consolidation among carriers and terminal operators may reduce service frequency and increase freight rates.

Our commitment

1. **Equitable access to services**
   Guarantee non-discriminatory shipping access for all fresh produce exporters. Avoid practices that inflate costs or restrict service availability.

2. **Prioritization of perishable cargo**
   Ensure fresh produce receives fair scheduling, adequate capacity, and competitive pricing.

3. **Optimized operational performance**
   Use digital tools and collaborate with stakeholders to reduce delays, improve container flow, and streamline cargo handling. Leverage digital tools and stakeholder collaboration to reduce delays, improve container flow, and enhance cargo handling efficiency.

4. **Transparent performance monitoring**
   Establish clear benchmarks and reporting tools to evaluate and improve service quality.

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Principle 4. CARGO INTEGRITY AND PRODUCT QUALITY

We acknowledge that perishable goods demand precise handling, temperature control, and timely delivery to preserve freshness and hygiene, minimize waste, and meet consumer expectations. Globally, a significant share of fresh fruits and vegetables are lost due to poor handling, delays, and inadequate cold chain management. Improper temperature control during transport can trigger microbial growth, spoilage, and food safety risks. Correct handling, regular scheduling and clear prioritization can improve delivery efficiency and elevate product quality.

Our commitment

1. **Tracking and traceability**
   Use GPS, IoT sensors, and digital records to track cargo location and condition in real time and ensure end-to-end traceability.

2. **Cold chain reliability**
   Maintain consistent temperatures from origin to destination using refrigerated containers and real-time monitoring, with swift response to equipment failures.

3. **Best handling practices**
   Train personnel in proper loading and unloading techniques to uphold fundamental hygiene standards, avoid damage when handling produce, and use certified packaging tailored for perishable goods.

4. **Delay prevention and contingency planning**
   Collaborate with ports, customs, and transport providers to reduce dwell times, prioritize perishable cargo, and implement contingency plans for potential disruptions.

5. **Food safety standards compliance**
   Follow cargo owner instructions for food safety. If none are provided, apply Codex Alimentarius hygiene principles and, where relevant, HACCP-based risk management. Comply with all applicable national and international regulations.

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Principle 5. RESILIENCE AND RISKS PREPAREDNESS

We acknowledge that global supply chains are increasingly exposed to extreme weather, port congestion, labor unrest, geopolitical tensions, and shifting regulatory landscapes. These disruptions can severely impact the timely delivery of fresh produce, triggering volatility in supply and demand. When shipments are delayed or rerouted, markets may experience sudden shortages or gluts, distorting prices and undermining consumer confidence. Such instability can ripple across regions, affecting trade relationships and weakening food system resilience—especially in economies heavily reliant on imports or seasonal harvests.

Our commitment

1. **Contingency planning**
   Maintain up-to-date risk assessments and emergency plans, including backup routes, suppliers, and flexible schedules to reduce disruptions.

2. **Crisis coordination**
   Ensure timely, transparent communication across sectors and participate in joint drills, early warning systems, and coordinated recovery efforts.

3. **Resilient infrastructure**
   Support multi-modal transport, back-up systems and interoperable logistics platforms to ensure continuity during crises.

4. **Climate risk adaptation**
   Adopt measures to address climate-related risks and support green infrastructure that strengthens supply chain and community resilience.

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Antitrust Statement

The Global Coalition of Fresh Produce ("the Coalition") and all signatories to the Charter of Good Shipping Practices ("the Charter") are committed to upholding the highest standards of ethical conduct, legal compliance to all applicable laws and regulations established by authorities, and transparency. This Antitrust Statement outlines our dedication to fostering a fair, competitive, and legally compliant environment for all Coalition members, signatories, and other stakeholders in global shipping supply chains for fresh produce. The Principles in this Charter are intended to promote transparency and efficiency, without influencing or coordinating market behavior or interfering with competition and market dynamics.

The Coalition, its members, and all signatories to this Charter agree to adhere to the following antitrust guidelines:
Signatories of this Charter are expected to comply with all applicable competition and antitrust laws in relevant jurisdictions. All discussions under the Charter will remain conceptual. Any discussions, agreements, or coordinated actions—whether formal or informal—that may restrict competition or violate applicable competition and antitrust laws are strictly prohibited. This prohibition includes the exchange of information concerning current or future prices, rates, surcharges, rebates, profit margins, volumes, capacity or coverage decisions, market allocation, market practices, contractual strategies, claims settlement practices, carrier-specific commercial terms or any other competitive aspect of an individual company's operation. Any data shared under this Charter must be operational, technical, historical, and anonymized and/or aggregated in nature. All signatories to this Charter are expected to act independently in their business decisions and to avoid any conduct that could be perceived as anti-competitive. Each participant is obligated to speak up immediately for the purpose of preventing any discussion falling outside these bounds.

Disclaimer

The Charter is not legally binding and intended solely as a guide to promote responsible and transparent shipping practices. Participation in the Charter and adherence to its Principles are entirely voluntary. Nothing in the Charter shall be interpreted as creating legal obligations, rights, or liabilities for signatories or for the Coalition under any law or legal system, now or in the future. The Charter does not replace, alter, or override any applicable laws or regulations established by authorities. Signatories remain fully responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements. The Charter and its contents are not to be used as, or form part of, evidence in any legal proceedings. Nothing in this Charter constitutes legal, commercial, or professional advice. It is not intended to interfere with or limit the commercial and operational decisions of individual businesses. The Charter does not prescribe, recommend, standardize, align, or imply specific contractual terms, conditions, or pricing. Nothing in this Charter is intended to facilitate or encourage coordination of commercial conduct, pricing, capacity allocation, contractual terms, or competitive strategy among signatories. The Charter shall not be used as a basis for collective bargaining, coordinated negotiation, or joint market conduct, nor shall adherence be construed as evidence of concerted practices. Signatories retain full autonomy in their commercial negotiations and strategic and operational decision-making, and all commercial and contractual terms and conditions remain subject to free bilateral negotiation. Neither the Coalition, its members, nor other signatories shall engage in discussions or activities that could lead to the boycott of a supplier or customer or to the conclusion that a named supplier or customer is not a suitable business partner.

Industry associations that become signatories do so solely in an advocacy, facilitative, and non-commercial capacity. Nothing in this Code authorizes or permits an industry association to coordinate, influence, or align the commercial decisions, pricing, negotiations, or competitive behavior of its members.

The Coalition makes no warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, relevance, or reliability of the information contained in this Charter. Users are solely responsible for evaluating the content and determining its applicability to their circumstances. Any reliance on the Charter is at the user's own risk. The Coalition shall not be liable for any loss, claim, liability, or costs arising from or related to the use of this Charter.

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