



Our Commitment to Quality

Quality can mean different things to different people, but most often for consumers and retailers it means consistency and reliability. For consumers, quality means being able to purchase from the same supermarket, week after week, products that meet their exact personal standards in terms of size, taste and appearance. For retailers, it means dependable delivery of quality produce that has a reliable shelf life, comes in easy to handle, recyclable or disposable packaging, and is consistent in size and color so that displays are easily created and instantly attractive.

Criteria such as nutritional value, cleanliness and freedom from decay are no longer considered additional indicators of quality - customers simply assume that these requirements will automatically be met. It is Dole's task to understand these multiple expectations and to provide products that consistently meet or exceed the expectations of both our customers and consumers.

Quality Assurance Program

In order to ensure that Dole consistently reaches its quality objectives, the Company has developed quality assurance (QA) programs and guidelines. These procedures not only ensure that Dole is meeting due diligence, as required by applicable legislation, but also ensure top-quality products and maintain Dole's position of leadership in this area. Furthermore, the programs and guidelines are regularly reviewed in accordance with the Company's philosophy of continuous improvement.

The Guidelines apply equally to both goods produced by Dole and goods supplied by independent growers. Special attention is paid to suppliers with whom the Company has not previously worked.

Quality Assurance Managers working in Dole's business units verify that QA Guidelines are implemented at all stages from production to retail in the products marketed by Dole.

QA Programs and Guidelines are set out clearly in QA manuals. The manuals are essential guides for all Quality Assurance Managers and play a key role in Dole's overall quality strategy.

The Quality Cycle - Cultivation

At Dole, the quality cycle begins before planting. Prior to the cultivation stage, Dole selects its seeds and plants for the nutritional value and flavor of the fruits and vegetables they will produce.

Bananas and pineapple growers carry out soil and leaf analyses to ensure that the plants and trees from which the produce will be harvested have the correct balance of nutrients. Dole cultivates produce that is adapted to the local soil and climate.

Dole prescribes logs and monitors the number of days of sunshine and the number of days between flowerings and harvesting that must be respected before picking produce, to ensure harvesting of fruits and vegetables at the optimum time.

Agronomists regularly perform field inspections to check on growing conditions, placing special emphasis on the use and effectiveness of crop protection products. In Dole's farming operations, the Company uses sustainable agricultural practices and integrated pest management methods that employ biological and cultural approaches to controlling pest and plant diseases. Dole uses conventional crop protection products only when and where necessary, and with the proper care and in accordance with applicable laws. Dole will not use, anywhere, any product banned for reasons of unacceptable health or environmental risk by the United States Environmental Protection Agency or by the European Union.

The Quality Cycle - Harvesting

A key tool that enables Dole to maintain its rigorous standards is the Company's harvesting grades program. Dole's objective is to consistently exceed standards, such as those set by the European Union or other individual country quality standards - a process that starts even before the produce is harvested.

In the harvesting grades program, Dole producers measure indicators of quality, such as the sugar-to-acid content of citrus and the firmness of apples and pears while they are still tree-borne. The end result is the guarantee that oranges have reached the desired degree of sweetness and those apples and pears are sufficiently crunchy before they are harvested.

Dole uses grading programs tailored to meet the requests and market tastes of individual retailers. This means Dole consumers are assured of products of the highest quality.

A second quality check is carried out once the fruits and vegetables have been harvested to ensure that they meet Dole's high standards. Once the produce passes inspection and appropriate harvesting information collected, the produce is sent to the next stage of the production cycle - the packing phase.

The Quality Cycle - Packing or processing

Dole implements strict procedures in its facilities and on its farms in conformity with ISO 9001, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and/or Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) rules where recommended or required by applicable law. Dole expects its independent growers to meet the same standards as Dole-owned farms.

HACCP is a system of guidelines that enables food industry participants to:

- Analyze potential food hazards
- Identify points in operations where food hazards may occur
- Determine which points in operations could be critical to food safety
- Conduct reviews of food hazards, critical control points, and monitoring procedures on a regular basis and upon any changes in operations
- Establish records and provide documentation

When produce arrives at the fruit facility, it is subjected to a third quality check to make sure that the fruit has not been bruised or otherwise damaged during the journey from the plantation.

Only when imperfect fruit or vegetables have been removed does Dole proceed with custom-grading and packing or processing the produce according to specific retail requirements, ensuring that received goods match retailers' needs and expectations, as well as those of the final customer - the consumer. To this end, Dole pays close attention to consumer feedback so that, as tastes evolve, Dole can supply products that continue to satisfy the preferences of the ultimate purchasers of its fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Quality Cycle - Transportation

Dole produce is in ideal shipping condition when it is packed. To ensure that bananas, pineapples and deciduous fruit remain fresh, they are submitted to an additional dockside inspection before they are loaded onto ships for export.

The entire Dole-owned shipping fleet complies with International Safety Management (ISM) standards, a mandatory requirement for shipping fleets worldwide, and the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code.

The ISM certification requires close communication with the shipping fleet and the shipping company on issues such as safety and protection of the marine environment. It covers emergency preparedness, ship maintenance and lists the officers' responsibilities. Dole ships all of its goods in optimum conditions. Temperature, humidity, air quality and oxygen levels are all stringently monitored to keep the produce at the peak of freshness. Frequent checks are carried out during transit so that if an unexpected quality development occurs, immediate corrective steps can be taken. Careful records are kept throughout the journey and later passed on to QA management.

Furthermore, Dole is committed to move its produce from the country of origin to the country of sale as quickly as possible to guarantee freshness upon arrival. Once goods reach their final destination, Quality Assurance checks are performed to assure that the produce continues to meet Dole standards. In turn, this ensures high quality produce for the customer and great taste for the consumer. For all its products, fresh as well as packaged foods, Dole carefully follows a due diligence procedure. Due diligence means to take **'all reasonable precautions'** and **'all reasonable care'** and it is a way of thinking that underpins the Dole Company's approach to its business. Also contained within the definition of due diligence is the assurance that there is complete compliance with any legal requirement that applies to the Dole products distributed in Europe. Samples are taken and sent to independent laboratories for analysis, such as microbiological and Maximum Residue Level (MRL) testing. More information about the Company's efforts in this area follows in the section on Food Safety.

The Quality Cycle - Storing, Ripening and Distribution

Before produce is shipped and while samples are being tested, incoming fruit and vegetables are stored in special climate-controlled warehouses. Products are then carefully packed and inspected before being shipped as well as on arrival in the warehouse. Once again, the quality procedures implemented at this stage follow strict standards.

ISO 9001 certifications have also been achieved or are in the process of being achieved by Dole's European ripening rooms. Ripening rooms are used to bring certain fruit (such as bananas) to the optimal level of maturity before being sent to the customer. In the event that produce is sent directly from the port to the retailer/ wholesaler, Dole's commitment to quality includes recommendations for transport, storage, ripening and pre-packing.

Dole's commitment does not end once the produce has reached the point of sale. Once the retailer receives the produce, Dole continues to provide support in the form of recommendations on the display, merchandising and appearance of Dole's products, as well as expert advice on the correct way to handle and ripen Dole produce. It is in this way that the Company guarantees Dole's assurance of quality truly extends throughout the entire production chain.

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